

The National Confidential Enquiry into Patient Outcome and Death (NCEPOD) is a charity that works to make healthcare services better for the people who use them.

We do this by collecting information from people who have used healthcare services. Our work has led to lots of positive changes in how healthcare is provided.

WHAT WE FOUND

Low and high blood sodium levels were not always acted on as they should have been.

Patients did not have consistent assessment of their fluid status and monitoring and/or recording of their fluid balance.

The cause of the low or high blood sodium was not always fully investigated.

The choice of treatment for low blood sodium should have been different for some patients.

Medication changes were not always communicated which could lead to patients restarting medications that had caused their abnormal blood sodium

We collected information from hospitals and doctors to see how care for people with a low or high blood sodium level in hospital could be made better.

WHAT HEALTH SERVICES CAN DO

Provide more training for clinicians and create care bundles with clear information on what investigations and treatment need to be undertaken and the timeframe in which this should happen

Develop clear standards and tools for the assessment and recording of fluid status in all patients with abnormal blood sodium levels. Audit the accuracy of fluid balance records.

Involve appropriate specialists in outlining the reasons for medication changes and communicate these to GPs.

Chief Executives and others could ensure that discharge letters include a mandatory section on whether any medication changes have occurred, with the rationale for those changes.

For information about abnormal blood sodium:

Low blood sodium - Hyponatraemia

High blood sodium - Hypernatraemia

www.ncepod.org.uk

WHAT YOU AS A PATIENT/CARER CAN DO

Ask your hospital team if the underlying cause of your low or high sodium was determined and what this means for your overall health. Is there anything you can do or change to help prevent this happening again.

If any of your regular medications were stopped or altered in hospital, then ask your hospital team if this is a permanent change. Any medication changes and the reason for them should be communicated to your GP.

Remember: No question is too small or unimportant. Your healthcare team wants to help you understand your admission to hospital and feel confident about your care. If you don't understand something, keep asking until you do.

