

MEDICINES INFORMATION & ADVICE ALERT

ISSUE 5

DECEMBER 2025



SPOTLIGHT
Learning from Practice

Reducing errors due to high workload

Background

- High workload and pressure in busy NHS MI settings can lead to errors and near misses.
- Common risks include multitasking, rushing responses, and skipping checks.
- These errors can compromise patient safety and impact the service reputation.
- The following are considerations and recommendations from UKMi QRMG, they are not exhaustive.

Actions for safer practice

Pause and prioritise

- Never accept 'ASAP' as a deadline for the answer. Always give your deadline and then negotiate around clinical urgency.
- For MI teams, allocate enquiries on receipt to named staff and monitor workload distribution. Assign the monitoring role to suitably trained MI staff so they can identify pressures and help find solutions.
- When asked to do additional work, think about what you need to stop to make time for it.

Build in safety nets

- Consider mandatory second-checks for high-risk enquiries such as paediatrics, pregnancy, and renal. Make sure MI staff know who can do a second check. See the [UKMi Guidance on checking MI enquiries](#).
- Use structured answer templates and, where available, use MiDatabank special fields. These can reduce omissions and provide consistent answer format.
- Use structured research templates to reduce omissions and variability. The [UKMi Enquiry Answering Guidelines](#) and [UKMi Essential Resources List](#) were being reviewed at the time of writing.

Manage interruptions

- Block focused time for complex enquiries.
- Use 'Do Not Disturb' signs, noise cancelling headsets, or quieter spaces where available.
- For lone workers who have no cover staff or alternative options when they need focused or protected time, discuss the impact of using voicemail with your line manager.

Process and scope

- Ensure Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for enquiry handling are up-to-date and easily accessible. Include what to do if staffing levels fall below a safe threshold.
- Challenge inappropriate use of MI services and signpost alternatives. Ask yourself if MI is best placed to answer or if someone else is.
- Have clear internal escalation routes so MI staff know who to speak to and how to get in touch with them. Senior staff should be able to make risk mitigation decisions and help staff in a timely manner.
- Make sure staff know how to report errors and misses, and how to submit a [UKMi ALERT](#) for system learning.
- Look for themes in questions and identify if there are departmental training needs. Monitor the impact of proactive measures on MI workload.

Team and technology

- Short daily huddles for workload planning and mitigating risks.
- Rotate MI staff between enquiry answering and other tasks to reduce cognitive fatigue. Try to allocate protected time.
- Use a daily or weekly MI staff workload planning board. Consider having [job plans](#) for larger teams.
- Consider where automation could improve processing efficiency and understand its limitations.

Wellbeing

- Take breaks away from the enquiry process.
- Staff should feel safe to ask for help or flag concerns - managers can only act if they know.
- Access your Trust's wellbeing support team and tips. If you are tired and stressed out, you are more likely to make an error.

Real examples from MI services

- Sent wrong answer to wrong enquirer while juggling two enquiries.
- Misheard drug name when answering a call mid-enquiry.
- Skipped second check on fridge excursion response - asked for wrong data from manufacturer.
- Missed polyethylene glycol (PEG) synonyms (macrogols) in allergy advice due to time pressure.
- Pressured into giving verbal advice to stop a Parkinson's medicine abruptly which was later found to be a high-risk error.

High workload increases cognitive overload and error risk. Use structured processes, prioritisation, and help from your colleagues to stay safe.

When something does go wrong

- Follow your in-house procedure for errors or near misses
- Submit an anonymous report through a [UKMi ALERT](#)
- Learn as a team

For further details, resources and supporting materials see <https://www.ukmi.nhs.uk/>.
For any enquiries about this alert, email jam.husain@nhs.net