



Implementing Clinical Decision Support Systems In Pharmacy Practice For Drug Interaction Checks

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ABSTRACT

Clinical Decision Support Systems (CDSS) have become indispensable tools in healthcare, offering clinicians vital guidance and information to aid in patient care. Integrating CDSS into Computerized Physician Order Entry (CPOE) systems holds the promise of transforming healthcare by improving safety, quality, and efficiency. A key aspect of CDSS is its role in identifying and managing drug-drug interactions (DDIs), a critical concern in today's complex medication landscape. DDIs can lead to adverse drug events (ADEs), which have far-reaching consequences, including increased hospitalization rates, extended hospital stays, and patient morbidity and mortality. CDSS can play a pivotal role in early DDI detection, potentially mitigating these risks. However, the effectiveness of CDSS-generated DDI alerts varies, and many go unheeded due to various factors, including alert fatigue and shortcomings in design.

Efforts to enhance DDI alerts focus on standardizing their presentation, content, and resolution procedures. Elements such as clear drug pair identification, severity indication, clinical consequences, and risk mitigation guidance are deemed essential. Ensuring consistency in terminology, symbols, and symbols is crucial, as is incorporating patient-specific data and contextual information into alerting logic. A team-oriented approach to DDI management, involving various healthcare professionals, is advocated to ensure optimal patient care. Assessing the effectiveness of DDI alerts should consider both measurable and perceived value, recognizing that clinicians' perceptions may vary based on their expertise and roles. Additionally, it is essential to avoid over-reliance on override rates as the sole metric for evaluating alert efficacy. Overall, CDSS and DDI alerting systems have the potential to greatly improve patient safety and healthcare outcomes. However, continuous research, standardization, and user-centric design are necessary to fully realize their benefits and mitigate associated challenges.

Keywords: Clinical Decision Support Systems (CDSS), Drug-Drug Interactions (DDIs), Alert Fatigue, Patient Safety, Medication Management, Healthcare Optimization

INTRODUCTION

Clinical Decision Support Systems (CDSS) have emerged as indispensable tools within computerized physician order entry (CPOE) systems, aimed at augmenting healthcare decision-making processes. CDSS, as defined, refers to "computer software employing a knowledgebase designed for use by a clinician involved in patient care, as a direct aid to clinical decision making" (1). The integration of CDSS into CPOE systems has shown the potential to revolutionize patient care by enhancing safety, quality, and efficiency (2).

One pivotal facet of CDSS integration is its role in guiding prescribers regarding proper dosing and alerting them to potential drug-drug interactions (DDIs), duplicate therapies, and drug allergies(3). Traditionally, physicians and pharmacists have relied on their clinical expertise to assess and manage DDIs, a practice that may not be entirely foolproof given the increasing complexity and volume of medications in today's healthcare landscape. This situation beckons us to explore innovative approaches to enhance DDI identification, with the implementation of technology, particularly CDSS, as a prominent solution. DDIs can lead to adverse drug events (ADEs), which are not only predictable but also preventable in many instances(4).

ADEs contribute to higher hospitalization rates, prolonged lengths of stay, and ultimately, patient morbidity and mortality(5). Hence, the timely identification of DDIs becomes paramount in ensuring the safety and efficacy of pharmacotherapy. CDSS has demonstrated its ability to facilitate the early detection of DDIs, which can be a game-

changer (5).The effectiveness of CDSS in generating DDI alerts has shown variability, with percentages ranging from 7% to 36% of medication orders (6-9).

Prescribers' acceptance of these alerts, defined by their decision to cancel or modify the initial order, hovers between 9% and 12% (10). While these figures may appear modest, they do not capture the full scope of prescribers' actions that can further contribute to preventing adverse drug reactions, such as increased patient monitoring or adjustments in laboratory or drug levels (10). However, the precise impact of CDSS on patient outcomes remains to be fully understood. Despite the evident advantages, CDSS also faces certain limitations (11). A significant portion of DDI alerts generated by CDSS systems goes unheeded by physicians(12, 13). This could be attributed to various factors, including prescribers underestimating the significance of the DDI or the CDSS system overemphasizing its importance. Moreover, the oversight of human factors during alert system implementation and shortcomings in alert design have been associated with the bypassing of alerts(14, 15).

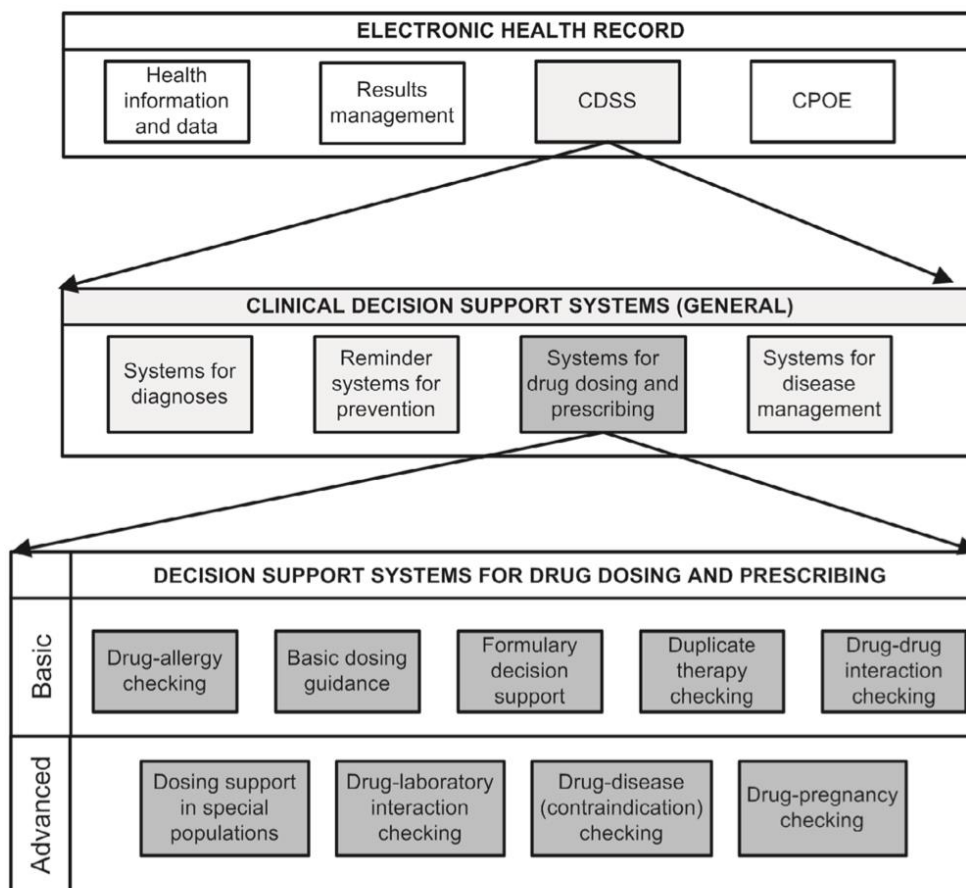


Figure 1. The spectrum of decision support (16).

Regulatory bodies worldwide advocate for the inclusion of CDSS within CPOE systems, making it a crucial component of modern healthcare practice(17, 18). Therefore, institutions must not only acknowledge the potential of CDSS but also strive to optimize its benefits while addressing its challenges. In this review, we will examine the implementation of CDSS in pharmacy practice for drug interaction checks. Through an analysis of existing research, we aim to provide insights into the efficacy, constraints, and prospective applications of this technology in elevating patient safety and optimizing healthcare outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This study conducted a comprehensive literature search on January 30, 2023, in Medline and Cochrane databases, employing medical subject headings (MeSH) and relevant terms. To ensure thoroughness, a manual search was also carried out on Google Scholar using reference lists from identified papers as a starting point. No restrictions were placed on publication date, language, participant age, or publication type. The focus was on papers discussing Clinical Decision Support System implementation in pharmacy practice for drug interaction checks.

DISCUSSION

Implementing standardized procedures for the presentation, content, and resolution of DDI alerts has the potential to significantly enhance their effectiveness in clinical settings, fostering advancements in patient safety and healthcare productivity. Human factors engineering research underscores the significant impact of color, visibility, and prioritization on clinicians' responses to safety warnings(19). While this body of research offers valuable insights into designing

warnings for various safety hazards, its application to drug-related warnings remains limited(20). Notably, the inconsistent presentation of alert information to clinicians, especially when dealing with multiple systems, may lead to cognitive overload and confusion. There is a strong recommendation to enhance the consistency and uniformity of DDI alert presentations across various systems. Concerning the content of DDI alerts, existing safety literature proposes four essential elements: a signal word indicating the severity of the DDI, hazard information specifying the potentially harmful drug combination, guidance on risk mitigation, and an account of potential clinical consequences if the hazard goes unaddressed(19, 21). Recent research also emphasizes the value of integrating contextual information and patient-specific data into algorithm logic to improve DDI alerts (22, 23). As a result, DDI alerting systems are advised to incorporate seven essential elements including identification of the drugs involved, classification of severity, description of clinical consequences (including frequency), elucidation of the interaction's mechanism, integration of contextual information and modifiable factors, provision of recommended actions, and presentation of supporting evidence. To prevent confusion, initial DDI alerts should precisely identify the interacting drug pair or individual drugs(24). Research has shown that prescribers encounter challenges in understanding why alerts are triggered, emphasizing the importance of clear drug pair identification (23). To achieve this, it is recommended to use both the prescribed medication name and generic ingredient names, particularly when dealing with combination products(5).

Consistency in indicating the potential severity of DDIs using standardized terms and definitions across all CDSSs is crucial (14, 25). However, determining the most appropriate terminology requires further research. Additionally, DDI alerts should provide detailed descriptions of potential adverse clinical outcomes associated with the interaction, allowing clinicians to weigh the risks and benefits efficiently(26). If available, information regarding the frequency or incidence of adverse events linked to a specific DDI and predisposing risk factors should be included to assess individual patient risk. Clinicians must possess a comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanism of a DDI to make informed decisions regarding suitable therapeutic alternatives(26). In addition, the incorporation of contextual details, such as concurrent medical conditions and laboratory findings, expedites alert processing and improves relevance. Patient-specific factors like age, pharmacogenomic phenotype, and specific drug regimens should be incorporated into alerting logic or displayed in the alert interface(27).

When presenting a DDI alert, guidance should be provided on strategies to mitigate potential harm, such as dose modification, order cancellation, alternative medication selection, and monitoring/surveillance measures(25, 27, 28). Since numerous DDIs may warrant multiple responses, CDS systems should offer customizable lists of recommendations that consider organizational and formulary factors. Alerts should convey information regarding the quality and source of the evidence supporting DDIs(5, 23). For instance, they could reference case reports or clinical trials. Using clear symbols, letters, or numbers to convey the evidence, along with detailed explanations of the grading framework, is advisable(25). Additionally, systematic assessment of DDI evidence should be part of alerting systems.

To ensure optimal usability, alert presentation should be consistent across and within EHR systems, allowing clinicians to identify and respond to alerts, even when transitioning between different environments quickly and accurately. Semantic clarity and visual cue processing can be improved by consistently using color and symbols, employing clear terminology, presenting information concisely, and minimizing textual content(5, 22). While interruptive alerts are recommended for the most severe DDIs, enhancing safety and efficiency can be achieved through proactive guidance to safer alternative options, eliminating the need for interruptive alerts. However, it is crucial for patient safety that institutions exercise prudence to prevent indiscriminate suppression of clinically relevant alerts(29).

Essential details should be displayed prominently in the alert, with supplementary information and secondary considerations accessible through hyperlinks(30). Balancing succinct communication with sufficient information for informed decision-making should be addressed through iterative alert prototyping and usability testing (19). Further research is needed to determine essential components for primary and secondary dialog boxes in DDI alerts.

To avoid the need for alerts, DDI alert information should be presented at the point of decision-making, guiding prescribers toward lower-risk drug selections during the initial stages of medication selection(31). To streamline alert resolution, clinicians should be presented with a list of actionable options, including discontinuing medications, adjusting doses, providing patient education, or ordering laboratory tests. Additionally, a system should facilitate clinicians in providing override reasons, aiding in the identification of false positives and false negatives in alerts. This feedback can be shared with other clinicians to ensure accountability and contribute to quality improvement initiatives. Investigating complex alert resolution options, such as delegating alerts to multiple clinicians or postponing alerts, should be done cautiously, with appropriate audit trails and workflows to guarantee patient safety (29).

Ensuring optimal patient care within a secure medication management process hinges on effective collaboration and interdisciplinary coordination. DDI decision support is relevant to all members of the healthcare team, encompassing patients, prescribers, pharmacists, and nurses. For clinicians without prescribing authority, DDI alerts serve as an additional layer of verification, guarding against inadequate monitoring or assessment of patients on interacting drug regimens. Full awareness of each team member's actions promotes superior patient care and safety(32). Thus, we advocate for a team-centric approach to DDI management, while suggesting that the core content of alerts remains consistent across different clinician categories. However, the presentation of this information should be flexible to align with the contexts, roles, functions, responsibilities, and privileges of diverse healthcare professionals. For instance, prescriber recommendations may focus on specifying monitoring parameters, while pharmacists could receive notifications to confirm monitoring orders and review results.

Another essential aspect to consider is how the alert display should evolve if a clinician encounters the same alert repeatedly without observable behavior changes. Likewise, there is a debate regarding whether alerts related to DDIs

managed routinely by specialists with specialized training or roles (e.g., warfarin clinic pharmacists receiving alerts for warfarin interactions with patients under their care) should be subjected to deactivation. Currently, there is no empirical evidence supporting the complete deactivation of DDI alerts for specialists. Nevertheless, implementing more discerning institutional practices for DDI alerts could alleviate a significant portion of the alert burden. EHR system architecture should facilitate institutions in making these adjustments based on clinician attributes. In addition to their critical role in DDI risk management, patients should actively participate in monitoring for signs of drug toxicity or reduced efficacy(33, 34). It is advisable to adhere to evidence-based best practices when providing printed patient information.

Evaluating the effectiveness of DDI decision support requires a comprehensive assessment that encompasses multiple dimensions. The assessment of Clinical Decision Support (CDS) value involves comparing outcomes to the costs associated with interactions, which encompass factors such as cognitive load and time commitment(35). Effectiveness in clinical decision support (CDS) can be defined as the result of both measurable and perceived value. Perceived value encompasses various aspects such as the cost associated with Adverse Drug Events (ADEs), heuristics, evidence quality, and clinician satisfaction. For instance, when considering a drug interaction between amiodarone and warfarin, evaluating value could entail monitoring increased rates of appropriately ordered International Normalized Ratio (INR) tests, adjusting the warfarin dosage, providing patient counseling, and conducting follow-up at anticoagulation clinics. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that clinicians' perceptions of the value of alerts may vary based on their professional settings and level of expertise. For example, the utility of an alert may differ among practicing cardiologists; medical residents, for instance, may find it exceptionally valuable if it merely serves as a reminder to request an INR test. Relying solely on alert override rates to assess effectiveness may fail to consider these value-added actions, unless they are explicitly documented in conjunction with the alert. Conversely, alerts that fail to provide value, whether quantified or perceived, should be precisely blocked to improve precision while maintaining sensitivity. Generally, an improvement in the effectiveness of an alert results in an increase in its value, which may potentially alleviate alert fatigue. It is advisable for alert logic to consider mitigating factors associated with a low occurrence of negative outcomes. Neglecting to account for these factors could lead to a diminished positive predictive value and, consequently, a reduced perceived value(6).

It is crucial to acknowledge that override rates alone cannot be used as the sole criterion for evaluating the efficacy of alerts(6, 36). A notable constraint is that existing systems fail to fully capture the cognitive processes and subsequent behaviors of clinicians. The rate of overrides provides a rudimentary indication of alert compliance. Override rates can be utilized as an initial step to identify alerts that require a more comprehensive evaluation process, including the incorporation of clinician feedback, in the short term. The comprehensive assessment should consider various elements, including clinician consensus on the perceived value of the alert, factors that alter its relevance, and actions performed in response to the alert (e.g., ordering additional monitoring). These aspects can be difficult to record using the alert system. There are ample opportunities for institutions to augment alerts and enhance their value; however, prior to implementing any modifications, they should undertake thorough evaluations. It may be rational to consider implementing a more selective alerting approach as a potential strategy to reduce alert fatigue without compromising clinical efficacy.

In the current realm of CDS, an overwhelming influx of DDI notifications has led to critical clinical alerts being overshadowed by a deluge of poorly presented and inconsequential messages. The findings of our research are poised to provide valuable guidance for optimizing and standardizing DDI alert procedures, ultimately aiming to alleviate alert fatigue and minimize patient harm. Prominent recommendations emphasize the importance of maintaining consistency in terminology, icons, symbols, color usage, minimizing textual content, employing appropriate formatting, and adhering to reporting and content standards to enhance usability. Many of these suggestions are applicable to various other facets of drug safety alerts and decision support, encompassing alerts for duplicate therapies and drug allergies.

Enhancing the usability of DDI decision support is of paramount importance as it places patient safety in jeopardy when clinicians dismiss DDI alerts due to their perceived lack of relevance or inadequate presentation. Clinicians tend to prioritize matters they perceive as having greater value when confronted with a multitude of concurrent requests and decisions. Striking an optimal balance between the time, attention, and cognitive resources allocated to DDI alerts and other critical responsibilities, such as patient interaction and diagnostic deliberations, is of utmost importance (37, 38).

Nevertheless, the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the existing literature encounters significant obstacles. The proprietary nature of commercial CDS software presents a substantial barrier, as obtaining vendor cooperation to relinquish control over specific design elements is no trivial task. Successful adoption of current recommendations necessitates a willingness on the part of institutions and vendors to embrace novel alert algorithms and design standards. This may entail, for instance, enabling laboratory monitoring directly from the DDI alert screen. Furthermore, there may be resistance to mandating the submission of standardized, de-identified data, citing increased labor and time requirements, along with concerns about potential risks associated with comparisons to alternative software systems. In the realm of DDI alerts, prioritizing safety concerns over vendor incentives is paramount, with the goal being the comprehension and mitigation of risks associated with patient harm.

While the existing recommendations hold promise in enhancing the consistency and comprehensibility of alerts, they may not significantly alleviate alert fatigue without substantial modifications to the knowledgebase content and alert logic. The efficacy of these suggestions is intrinsically tied to the reduction of interruptive DDI alerts, which are exclusively issued for the most critical DDIs requiring immediate clinician attention. Additionally, the establishment of a nationwide repository for alert data is a multifaceted and resource-intensive undertaking, and the implementation of further recommendations concerning the assessment of DDI alerting systems will prove challenging without access to population data.

To assess the impact of the DDI alert recommendations and the subsequent iteration of DDI decision support systems,

additional research is imperative. Rather than solely relying on DDI override rates, it is crucial to evaluate the most effective content and design of DDI alerts and prioritize outcomes, including the actual occurrence or prevention of ADEs. Further investigation is necessary to ascertain the most effective strategies for mitigating alert fatigue and, ultimately, enhancing patient safety. Although initially tailored for DDI alerts, these recommendations possess the potential to serve as a foundational framework for improving a wide array of drug safety alerts. For instance, clinicians frequently encounter multiple medication safety alerts concurrently, and the design considerations for DDI alerts and drug-allergy alerts exhibit considerable overlap. Consequently, most of the technical components are equally applicable to other medication-related alerts.

Table 1. Problems with detecting DDIs and developing alerts

Problem	Description
Healthcare Professionals' Knowledge	Limited pharmacological training for physicians can result in a lack of awareness regarding the dangers of various drug interactions, contributing to adverse reactions from clinically significant DDIs. (39, 40)
Clinical Significance of DDIs	Lack of standardization in ratings and classifications of DDIs due to different knowledgebases and severity rankings in CDSS, leading to inconsistencies in determining clinical significance. (14)
Alert Fatigue	Excessive alerts from CDSS can lead to alert fatigue, where important alerts may be ignored due to the overwhelming number of alerts received. (6)
Alert Information Complexity	Complex or lengthy drug interaction information can be challenging for clinicians to interpret, potentially leading to alert overrides. Clear communication of clinical consequences is essential. (6)
Justified vs. Unjustified Overrides	Overrides may be justified when benefits outweigh risks, but unjustified overrides, such as ignoring alerts, can compromise patient safety. (6)
Pharmacy Order Processing	Pharmacy systems involving support staff in order processing may result in pharmacists not seeing overridden or bypassed alerts, impacting medication safety. (41)

CONCLUSION

In summary, CDSS hold great potential to enhance healthcare decision-making and improve patient safety. The effectiveness of CDSS in generating DDI alerts can significantly impact patient outcomes. Standardization and improvements in alert presentation and content are essential to optimize CDSS performance. A team-oriented approach involving various healthcare professionals is crucial for comprehensive DDI management. Continuous research and refinement are needed to maximize the benefits of CDSS in evolving healthcare environments.

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