

# COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Interpersonal communication skills are important for pharmacists to master. Whether counseling patients, communicating with physicians, or interfacing with associates, pharmacists use their interpersonal communication skills daily. Effective communication by pharmacists is essential to improve the use of medications by patients and ensure optimal therapeutic outcomes.

# ESTABLISHING THE PHARMACIST-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP

- Pharmacists in all practice settings have opportunities to interface with patients, whether it is through counseling, interviewing, or educating. This relationship is built on the foundation of trust and an open exchange of information; it is a collaborative relationship.
- Pharmacists promise to utilize their clinical knowledge and skills to provide the best care for their patients. Patients, in turn, provide pharmacists with the information needed to effectively manage their drug therapy.

# STRATEGIES FOR ESTABLISHING THE PHARMACIST-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP

- Outline for the patient what will occur during the encounter.
- Demonstrate empathy or caring attitude so that the patient feels at ease.
- Discuss with the patients the amount time needed for the encounter.
- Discuss the expected outcome of the encounter.
- Use feedback strategies throughout the encounter to ensure patient understanding.
- Ensure sufficient time for patients to ask questions towards the end of the encounter.
- Resolve a drug therapy problem in a timely manner.
- Follow up with patients.

# PATIENT COUNSELLING

- Counseling patients regarding their medications is an important responsibility for pharmacists and an excellent learning opportunity for students. Pharmacists are often the only health care providers focusing patient education on medication: how to take it, what to expect, and side effects and drug interactions.
- Patient counseling sessions are also excellent opportunities to briefly review patients' medications and assess them for any drug therapy problems.
- Counseling method developed by the Indian Health Service (IHS), has been promoted as an effective strategy for patient counseling because it utilizes open-ended questions (3 prime questions) and feedback (final verification) strategies, which make communication between the pharmacist and patient more efficient and engaging.

# INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE COUNSELING MODEL

Three prime questions to ask patients who are receiving a new prescription:

- What did your doctor tell you the medication is for?
- How did the doctor tell you to take it?
- What did the doctor tell you to expect?

Final verification or asking the patient for feedback

- Just to make sure that I didn't leave anything out, please tell me how you are going to take your medication?

Show and tell strategy when a patient is receiving a refill

- What do you take the medication for?
- How do you take it?
- What kind of problems are you having?

# INTERVIEWING PATIENTS

- There are times when pharmacists need to go beyond counseling patients during dispensing functions and collect more in-depth clinical information. This may occur during the provision of disease state or case management services, a comprehensive medication review, clinical services, or other types of clinical encounter with patients.
- During this time, pharmacists need to be systematic and organized with the patient interview to ensure that they are efficient with their time, as well as accurate and comprehensive with data collection.

# TIPS FOR GOOD PATIENT INTERVIEWS

Greet the patient and introduce yourself.

Explain the interview process.

Direct the patient to the consultation area.

Explain why you need to collect the information, what you will do with it, and that it will be treated confidentially.

Indicate how long the interview will last.

Use words/manners that convey professionalism.

Pay attention to body language.

Ask open-ended questions. Begin with broad questions and then get more specific.

Use active listening skills and demonstrate empathy.

Ask the patient to restate any unclear information and use paraphrasing feedback strategies to ensure that you understood.

Communicate at an appropriate educational level and avoid medical jargon.

# EDUCATING PATIENTS

- There are also several clinical situations where pharmacists should conduct an in-depth educational session to meet patient needs.
- Educational sessions provide patients with more comprehensive information regarding their medical conditions, treatment strategies, and/or lifestyle changes.
- Asking open-ended questions to determine what patients already know will be key to preventing pharmacists from providing information that is not needed: in other words, the educational session should be personalized.



# TARGETED METHODS FOR ACHIEVING THE OBJECTIVES OF A PATIENT EDUCATION SESSION

Learning Objective	Most Appropriate Method
Improve knowledge	Lecture, dialogue, reading, audio-visual methods
Improve understanding	Demonstrations, discussions
Develop skills	Encourage the patient to practice techniques
Change attitudes	Discussions, video stimulations

Knowles MS. *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: from pedagogy to andragogy*. Prentice Hall Regents, Englewood Cliffs, NJ:240: Rev and Updated, 1980, Cambridge Adult Education; Designing and managing learning activities

# BEST PRACTICES FOR PHARMACIST PROVIDED PATIENT-CENTERED COMMUNICATION

Goal	Pharmacist Responsibility	Communication Skills
Foster the Relationship	Build rapport Appear open Demonstrate respect Demonstrate caring and commitment Acknowledge feelings and emotions	Greet patient warmly and appropriately Maintain eye contact Show interest Listen actively Express empathy
Gather Information	Determine purpose of encounter Discover biomedical perspective (disease) Understand patient perspective (illness)	Ask open-ended questions Allow patient to complete responses Clarify and summarize information Explore impact of illness on patient
Provide Information	Identify patient informational needs Share information Overcome health literacy barriers	Speak plainly and avoid jargon Use "Patient-Oriented Evidence that Matters" (POEMs) Encourage questions Check for understanding
Share Decision-Making	Identify patient goals Outline collaborative treatment plan	Explore patient preferences Identify barriers to treatment choices Negotiate agreement
Enable Treatment Success	Assess the patient's capacity for self-management Arrange for needed support Advocate for and assist patient with health system	Summarize treatment plan Elicit patient understanding Discuss follow-up

<sup>a</sup> Adapted from King A, Hoppe RB. Best practice for patient-centered communication: A narrative review. JGME. 2013;5(3):385–393.

# COMMUNICATION WITH PHYSICIANS

- Developing collaborative working relationships with physicians is key to the success of a pharmacy practice.
- A theoretical model for the development of a physician~pharmacist collaborative relationship has been developed and utilizes participant, context, and exchange characteristics to describe how pharmacists and physicians move from the earlier stages of collaboration to one where both parties are committed to the professional relationship.
- There are essential components to practitioner collaboration including effective communication, sharing of patient care responsibilities, and viewing other practitioners' patient care services as equally valuable and complementary.
- This collaboration can lead to improved drug therapy monitoring, a more timely exchange of patient information, and a more efficient resolution of any drug therapy problems that arise.

- Role specification was the most influential driver for collaboration. This entails pharmacists and physicians understanding each other's role in the patient care process.
- Trustworthiness was also identified as an exchange characteristic that affects pharmacist-physician collaboration. Physicians need to trust the knowledge and clinical skills of pharmacists before they are willing to work with them and/or accept their clinical recommendations.

- Before pharmacists contact physicians about potential drug therapy problems they should first check reference sources and current research findings so they can confidently recommend alternative therapy plans.
- During the conversation, the pharmacist should keep the focus of the discussion on the patient, provide meaningful background information, clearly and concisely outline the problem the patient is experiencing or may experience with the prescribed drug therapy, and propose a solution to the problem.

# PHYSICIAN CONSULTS

- Pharmacists' recommendations should be concise, provide physicians with information that they may not know (eg, patient adherence to their regimen or other medications that have been prescribed by other providers), and suggest potential solution(s) to drug therapy problems that had been identified.

## COMMUNICATING INFORMATION TO PHYSICIANS

- Keep the conversation patient-focused.
- Provide the physician with meaningful background information.
- Concisely outline the problem the patient is experiencing with their drug therapy.
- Provide clinical medication recommendations and solutions.