

Counseling Patients for Improved Medication-Safety and Compliance

Approximately 80% of US adults use prescription medications, over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, or dietary supplements each week. Nearly 33% of all adults take 5 or more medications a day. Current research demonstrates that good communication and a partnership between patients and their health care team are key medication-safety success factors.

The Cost of Medication Injuries

Incorrect medication use costs the United States an estimated \$177 billion each year, including 9 million hospital visits and more than 18 million visits to the emergency room. Many medication-related injuries are attributed to the fact that patients take their medications incorrectly or neglect to take them at all.

A “culture of safety” can only be created when providers and patients treat each other as partners on a team whose ultimate goal is ensuring patient safety and satisfaction.

Factors Influencing Medication Mismanagement

In order to safely self manage, patients must understand the medical information they are given. Strategies—such as asking patients to repeat what they have just been told—must be in place to help ensure patient comprehension.

It is also imperative to consider the following causes of poor patient comprehension:

- Low health literacy—The average American reads at the 8th-grade level; however, most medical information is written at the college level
- Age—A decline in social support and cognition and an increase in the number of chronic illnesses makes seniors especially vulnerable. Children are also particularly vulnerable to medication errors because of their wide variance in weight
- Ethnicity—Increasing numbers of patients of diverse ethnic backgrounds lack proficiency in the English language

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Medication Counseling Checklist: Counseling Patients for Safe Medication Use

Use the chart below to assess and document the medication safety practices used with your patients.

Strategy	Completed	Action Plan
Counseling includes the drug name, purpose, dose, directions, expected outcomes, risks, and safety outcomes. Provide written information		
Assist patient in development of the medication list. Instruct patient to bring it to all doctor appointments and share with pharmacist		
Patients are encouraged to speak with their pharmacist for further information		
Patients are encouraged to ask questions about their medications		
Patients are taught about and given written information on how to use and maintain devices		
Patients who are hearing or visually impaired are given alternate communication guides (telecommunications device for the deaf [TDD]; caregiver education)		
Patients who do not speak or read English are provided language-appropriate written information		
For illiterate patients, information is provided verbally with adequate time for the patient and family to ask questions		
Consider community resources: Home nursing, interpreter services, community or hospital-based education resources		

