

**4. Written information.** It may be helpful for physicians to provide patients with written information about their medications. This information should include the elements outlined below.

**5. Follow-up.** During subsequent office visits, the physician should question the patient about compliance and any beneficial or adverse effects of the medication.



## Elements of written information

- Name of the medication
- Use of the medication
- Patient instructions before using the medication
- Instructions for proper use of the medication
- Precautions while using the medication
- Side effects of the medication that are serious or occur frequently

It is important that written information be scientifically accurate and non-promotional for a particular product. It should provide sufficient information so the patient can use the medication properly, be legible, and written in understandable language.

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**Guidelines for physicians for  
counseling patients about  
prescription medications  
in the ambulatory setting**

## Preamble

Prescription medications are among the most useful and cost-effective treatment options available in the health care system. Care often may be improved when physicians provide useful counseling and information about prescription medications to their patients.

The following guidelines were prepared to help physicians provide useful oral counseling and, when appropriate, written information about prescription medications that are prescribed for their patients in the ambulatory setting. These guidelines are intended to provide suggestions to physicians on the content of information that will likely be most useful to patients who are using prescription medications.

These guidelines are not substitutes for the best professional judgment of physicians in providing high quality care to their patients, and they should not be construed as standards of medical practice. Physicians are encouraged to customize prescription medication counseling and information to best meet the needs of individual patients.



## Guidelines for physicians for counseling patients<sup>1</sup> about prescription medications in the ambulatory setting<sup>2</sup>

**1. Medication record.** As part of the medical record, the physician should attempt to maintain and update, as necessary, a record (chart) of all medications (prescription and nonprescription) that the patient is taking currently.

**2. Treatment plan.** Decisions regarding the use of prescription medications are best accomplished out of a collaboration between the physician and the patient. This requires that the patient be aware of relevant information regarding the prescribed medication, as well as available alternatives. Therefore, the physician should discuss with the patient expectations of treatment and appropriate information regarding risks, benefits and appropriate alternatives of all medications that may be prescribed, prior to deciding on a treatment plan.

<sup>1</sup> The term patient, i.e., the person for whom the medication was prescribed and dispensed, is used throughout these guidelines. However, for some patients, other individuals (e.g., parents, guardians, caregivers) may also receive the counseling and information.

<sup>2</sup> These guidelines are not substitutes for the best professional judgment of physicians in providing high quality care to their patients, and they should not be construed as standards of medical practice.

**3. Oral counseling.** Physicians should counsel patients on their medications, emphasizing what is medically significant. Such information may include:

- The name of the medication and what it is supposed to do.
- How and when to take the medication and for how long.
- Appropriate foods, drinks, other prescription or nonprescription medications, dietary supplements, or activities that the patient should avoid while taking this medication.
- The relevant side effects that should be reported to the physician if they occur.
- If applicable, whether anything is unusual about the use of the medication being prescribed (e.g., for an off-label indication; prescribing larger than the usual dose).
- Whether the prescription can be refilled and how often.
- What written information the patient can take with them (if available) or instructions to obtain written information from their pharmacist.

After counseling the patient, the physician should encourage the patient to ask questions and should ask the patient whether he or she has any concerns about obtaining the medication or about using it in the way it was prescribed.