

# Medication Reconciliation: Communication Tips

## Introduction

Researchers have demonstrated that the medication information documented in a patient's medical record does not always accurately reflect the actual medications a patient may be taking.<sup>1,2</sup> Establishing a medication reconciliation process is an important way to help address this challenge. Medication reconciliation is the process of comparing a patient's current medication regimen against what is recorded in other sources and resolving any conflicts.<sup>3,4</sup>

## The Importance of Medication Reconciliation

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**It is essential** to reduce the rate of medical errors (eg, omissions, duplications, dosing errors).<sup>4</sup>

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**It helps** to ensure that medications added, changed, or discontinued are evaluated with the goal of maintaining an accurate list that is available to everyone involved in the patient's care (eg, the patient, family/caregiver, health care professionals).<sup>3</sup>

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**It should be completed** at every care transition (ie, changes in setting, services, provider, or level of care) where new medications are ordered or existing medications are renewed or adjusted.<sup>3,4</sup>

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# Medication Reconciliation: Communication Tips

**Medication reconciliation** is one of the more complex components of the health care delivery and patient safety process. In the home and other primarily self-care settings, adverse drug events (ADEs) can often be attributed to a patient's inability to accurately communicate his or her health information to the care provider. Contributing issues include<sup>5</sup>:

- Incomplete patient and drug information
- Not understanding the value of maintaining a personal medication record
- Not having the resources or ability to maintain a personal medication record
- Inability to actively participate (eg, lack of understanding of their condition, unfamiliarity with or inability to identify medications)
- Limited health literacy or cultural barriers

This *Medication Reconciliation: Communication Tips* resource offers more information on common communication barriers and explores how using active listening techniques can help address them.



## Ways to Improve Communication

The medication reconciliation process should be patient centered. This includes communicating in a way that is respectful to a patient's values and needs, involves their family or caregivers, provides education aligned to their health literacy level, and offers emotional support to relieve fear and anxiety.<sup>5</sup>



## Actively Listen

One way to improve patient-centered communication is through active listening. Active listening is a skill and a very effective strategy to improve communication.<sup>6</sup> It helps health care professionals listen carefully to what someone is saying while showing interest and not interrupting.

### Active listening techniques include<sup>6,7</sup>:

- Focusing on nonverbal visual cues—maintaining good eye contact, appropriate posture, and facial expressions
- Being attentive to the patient’s story—listening quietly with minimal verbal encouragement
- Reflecting back feelings and concerns—summarizing both the patient’s words and their purpose



## Ask the Right Questions

Communication is very much influenced by the way questions are worded. For example, avoid opening a patient conversation with overly broad questions, such as “How are you feeling?” or “How are you today?” The way these questions are worded may lead the patient to think of their fears/concerns as physical symptoms. Instead, more actionable questions (eg, “How can I help you today?”) bring focus to the purpose of the visit. These types of questions enable the patient to discuss anything relevant to their health and emphasizes the health care professional’s role as a supportive resource. After eliciting the patient’s agenda, start discussing the patient’s concerns with open-ended questions<sup>8</sup>:

- “Tell me more about...”
- “Would you like to talk more about...?”
- “I want to know how it started...”
- “Tell me what the...was like.”
- “What else did you notice?”



## Mindfully Respond

Communication is also influenced greatly by how health care professionals respond. Effective response strategies involve empathy—the ability to “connect” with patients. Empathy helps health care professionals to 1) understand the patient’s situation, perspective, and feelings and 2) communicate that understanding to the patient. The effective use of empathy leads to several advantages, such as diagnostic accuracy, therapeutic adherence, as well as satisfaction for both the patient and health care professional.<sup>9</sup>

### Examples of empathic responses include<sup>7</sup>:

- Empathic reflection of symptoms or ideas: “So you were fine until this morning when you woke up and...” or “Sounds like you think that...”
- Empathic reflection of patient interests and values: “So, if I’m hearing you right, what you really enjoy is...”



## Personally Connect

In addition to the techniques described above, other ways to help make a physical and emotional connection with patients include<sup>10</sup>:

- Provide an environment conducive to conversation—sit face-to-face and maintain eye contact with the patient
- Mind your voice—speak slowly, clearly, and loud enough to be heard without shouting
- Avoid distractions—limit multitasking and background noise
- Listen without interrupting—good communication depends on good listening, so as not to miss important information



## Ensure Understanding

When communicating with patients, the American Medical Association also recommends that health care professionals and staff use a technique called Safe Communication Universal Precautions to help improve patient understanding. Recommendations include<sup>5</sup>:

- Use plain language and nonmedical wording
- Speak slowly and use short statements
- Break information down and then check for understanding
- Highlight and repeat key concepts
- Use visual aids
- Offer to read materials aloud to patients and families/caregivers
- Communicate information/instructions and then ask the patient to repeat back in their own words (ie, “teach-back” method)



## Consider Different Technologies

- Consider leveraging the electronic health record (EHR) to improve accuracy and sustain medication reconciliation adherence<sup>11</sup>
- Additionally, implementation of telemedicine can further improve communication with patients. Telemedicine supports efforts to improve the quality of health care by increasing accessibility, providing clinical support, overcoming geographic barriers, and offering various types of communication devices<sup>12</sup>
- Smartphone apps may help improve communication between patients and health care professionals by helping them maintain a record of their medication regimen, including any changes made, and share that information with their providers<sup>13</sup>

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