



Consumers Can Help Prevent Harmful Medication Incidents

## SafeMedicationUse.ca Newsletter

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### Make Sure You Are Heard by Your Healthcare Providers

It can be daunting to ask healthcare providers questions about your care. This is especially true when you are sick or when you are in a hospital. You may feel overwhelmed by everything that is happening, or you may not understand the medical terms. However, asking questions and expressing concerns are important ways to avoid being harmed by mistakes. Don't be afraid to speak up. Make sure that your questions and concerns are addressed.



SafeMedicationUse.ca has received a report about communication problems between a patient and her healthcare team, and the steps her family took to make sure their concerns were addressed.

An elderly woman was taken to an emergency department for unmanageable pain and was admitted into the hospital. She brought a list of her home medicines with her. However, no one in the emergency department asked her about the medicines she was taking at home. The woman's family noticed that she was not receiving her medicines for treating Parkinson's disease and high blood pressure. They repeatedly asked the healthcare team why she was not receiving her medicines, but received no explanation. The woman's family members even offered to bring in the home supply of medications for her to take while she was in the hospital, but the healthcare team took no action. As a result, the woman did not receive her regular medicines for 2 days while in the hospital. Her Parkinson's symptoms worsened, and her blood pressure became unstable. Finally, the family turned to the hospital's Patient Advocacy Department, and the issue was resolved.

This case shows how important it is for family members to be persistent in advocating for the health and safety of their loved ones. SafeMedicationUse.ca has the following suggestions:

- **If you have questions or concerns about your healthcare or the care that a family member is receiving, speak up. If your concerns are not addressed, be persistent until you get an answer.** Healthcare professionals should welcome your questions. They should be able to provide answers that

address your concerns.

- **Keep a list of all your current medicines, and show it to your healthcare providers at every visit.** For example, if you are being admitted to hospital, visiting a physician, or speaking with a pharmacist or other healthcare provider, make sure that the healthcare provider is aware of the medicines you are currently taking.
- **Speak up if you don't get your usual medicines while in hospital.** If you have not been asked for your list of medicines, alert your healthcare providers. If the healthcare provider has decided to stop or change your medicines, your questions should be a reminder for them to explain why changes have been made.
- If you are feeling too sick to keep track of things, **try to have a family member or friend with you** when you are receiving care.
- **If communication fails while you are in a hospital, contact the hospital's Patient Advocacy Department.** Many hospitals have a Patient Advocacy Department or Patient Representative to assist patients, families, and caregivers to resolve concerns related to their care. If your concerns and questions are not being addressed by your healthcare providers, don't be afraid to ask for help.

Read more about speaking up when you have concerns:

[http://safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter\\_speakout.html](http://safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter_speakout.html)

Read more about keeping a list of your medicines:

[http://safemedicationuse.ca/tools\\_resources/medication\\_list.html](http://safemedicationuse.ca/tools_resources/medication_list.html)

The "Learn ... to be Safe" video series shows the importance of speaking up and asking about your medicines.

[http://www.safetoask.ca/?page\\_id=265](http://www.safetoask.ca/?page_id=265)

## Tips for Practitioners:

- If a patient has questions or concerns, take the time to listen. Ensure that the patient's questions are addressed by you or another healthcare provider.
- Review each patient's medication list at every visit, and ask about any changes to prescription and non-prescription medicines.
- If your patient's medicines need to be changed or stopped, always explain the changes (and the reasons for making them) to your patient or to a family caregiver.
- Ensure that your patient's medication list is updated when any treatment changes are made.
- Communicate any changes to other healthcare providers in the patient's circle of care.



## Medication Safety bulletins contribute to Global Patient Safety Alerts

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