



Consumers Can Help Prevent Harmful Medication Incidents

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Misconceptions about Medicines that Could Be Deadly: Part 3

In this, the final instalment of our series discussing common misconceptions about medicines, we describe a tragic incident in which sharing of a medicine led to a person's death. The misconceptions described in this series were identified through an [analysis](#) of errors that happened in a person's home or that involved medicines given by a person who did not have professional healthcare training. If you missed the first two parts of this series, you can read them here:

[Misconception One: It doesn't matter where I keep my medicines.](#)

www.safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter_Misconception1Storage.html

[Misconception Two: If one is good, two will be better.](#)

www.safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter_Misconception2ExtraDoses.html

Misconception Three: What works for me will work for you.

When a family member or friend suffers from a health problem, it's natural to want to help. If you've taken a medicine that helped you with a similar problem in the past, you may be tempted to offer the person the same medicine. You may think, "If this medicine worked so well for me, could there be any harm in letting someone else try it?" The answer to this question is yes: what works for you could in fact be harmful for someone else! The opposite is also true: what has worked for others could be unsafe for you. The following case illustrates how well-intentioned sharing can lead to tragic results.

A man was found dead at home one morning. He had been complaining of a mild cold and had suffered from insomnia in the past. During the night, his wife had noticed that he was groaning in his sleep, but she did not try to wake him. At the scene of the death, the police found the consumer's prescribed medications, along with a supply of morphine 30 mg sustained-release tablets. Morphine is an opioid medicine that is used to relieve pain. There was no evidence that morphine had ever been prescribed for

this consumer, so finding the morphine tablets was completely unexpected. Lab tests showed high levels of morphine in the man's blood. The cause of death was determined to be accidental morphine toxicity.

This tragic case, like a [previous case](#) described by SafeMedicationUse.ca, illustrates that sharing medicine is dangerous and can cause harm. This is especially important for opioid medicines, but it is also true for other prescription medicines. Never offer your prescription medicine to anyone, and never accept another person's prescription medicine. Always speak to a healthcare professional about what's right for you, especially if you are considering taking a medicine that has been touted as a "wonder drug" by a friend.

SafeMedicationUse.ca has the following advice to help you prevent events like the one described above.

- Never take another person's medicine. Medical treatment is tailored to each person's medical history.
- Never share any of your prescription medicines with others.
- Speak with your healthcare professional before adding a new medicine to your usual regimen. This advice applies to nonprescription medicines, vitamins, supplements, and herbal products. Even nonprescription medicines can interact with each other and with prescription medicines.

Tips for Practitioners

- Remind patients that prescribed medicines are only for them and should never be shared with others, even if symptoms seem similar.
- If a medication is prescribed for "as needed" use (e.g., a pain medicine), ask that patients return any unused medicine to the pharmacy for safe disposal when the medicine is no longer needed.



This is the third in a 3-part series dispelling common misconceptions about medicines.

Read more at:

- [Misconception One: It doesn't matter where I keep my medicines.](http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter_Misconception1Storage.html)
www.safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter_Misconception1Storage.html
- [Misconception Two: If one is good, two will be better.](http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/newsletter_Misconception2ExtraDoses.html)
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Medication Safety bulletins contribute to Global Patient Safety Alerts

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