

Guest Post: 5 Questions to Ask about Your Medications

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GUEST POST: 5 QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR MEDICATIONS

A Counselling Framework for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Students

One of the most rewarding parts of my job as a hospital pharmacist is that I get to talk to patients about their medications before they go home. Over the years, I find this is also one of the most important roles as a pharmacist, because of all the medications changes that can occur in hospital during the patient's stay. While we do important work for patients in our care by optimizing medication therapy, deprescribing and finding the right drugs and dosages for the right duration, we don't always do a great job of keeping the patients informed of all the changes that happen when they happen. As a result, it becomes especially important to clearly communicate drug therapy changes with the the patient/caregiver (and their next health care provider) before they leave.

This is easier said than done. Patients can be overloaded with so much info at discharge, making it easier for miscommunications to happen. When they go home, medication errors can occur because of a misunderstanding about their medications.

Providing a systematic approach to medication counselling along with providing clear, written instructions by way of a medication chart and using the teach-back method can help and prevent unnecessary re-admissions or preventable harm from medication errors.

Last year, I had the incredible opportunity to work on a team to develop a list of questions that patients and caregivers can ask to keep track of the medication changes and know how to take them safely. These questions can be used at the community pharmacy, before they leave the hospital, or at their family health team, family doctor or specialist offices.

The team that worked on this comprised of representatives from Patients for Patients Safety Canada, [Canadian Patient Safety Institute](#), the Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists, the Canadian Pharmacists Association and ISMP Canada. We wanted to keep it simple, yet give patients the words to ask the questions that would help keep them safe. After testing the question and receiving feedback from healthcare providers and patients, we developed the [5 Questions to Ask about your Medications](#).

5 QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR MEDICATIONS

5 QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR MEDICATIONS when you see your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.

1. CHANGES?

Have any medications been added, stopped or changed, and why?

2. CONTINUE?

What medications do I need to keep taking, and why?

3. PROPER USE?

How do I take my medications, and for how long?

4. MONITOR?

How will I know if my medication is working, and what side effects do I watch for?

5. FOLLOW-UP?

Do I need any tests and when do I book my next visit?



Keep your medication record up to date.

Remember to include:

- ✓ drug allergies
- ✓ vitamins and minerals
- ✓ herbal/natural products
- ✓ all medications including non-prescription products

Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist to review all your medications to see if any can be stopped or reduced.

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Visit [safemedicationuse.ca](#) for more information.



The 5 Questions to Ask about Your Medications is available in [over 20 languages](#) and can be used as a systematic approach to patient counselling during a medication review or as a teach-back tool. A [Patient Notes version](#) is also available with space for patients to record information next to each question.



Watch the video to learn more about the 5 Questions and don't forget to share it with your patients and colleagues.

Since its launch, we've heard [stories](#) of how the 5 Questions have been implemented in organizations across all sectors of healthcare and how it can [help patients](#) talk to their pharmacists about their medications.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

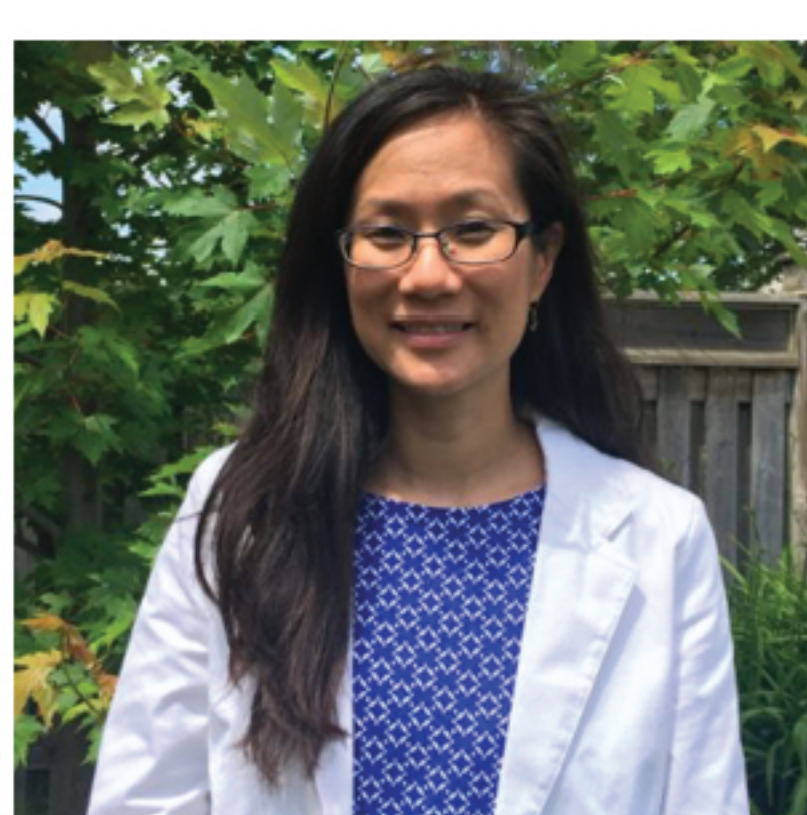
- As a pharmacist or pharmacy technician, introduce the 5 questions to ask to your patients or clients, pharmacy students and colleagues.
- Pharmacists or pharmacy students can use it as an approach to provide medication counselling or as a teach-back tool to confirm a patient's or caregiver's understanding of their medications.
- Join this year's Canadian Patient Safety Week campaign, [Take With Questions](#), focused on medication safety. [Register now!](#) for a free Canadian Patient Safety Week package!
- [Request](#) a customized PDF of the '5 questions to ask about your medications' with your organization's logo. Join the over 100 organizations who have endorsed these questions.



SHARE YOUR STORY

Share with us how the '5 Questions' is being used in your organization, its impact on you and your patients.

I hope you will give a try and let me know how it is working for you and your patients and caregivers!



Alice Watt, RPh, BScPhm, Medication Safety Specialist

Alice joined ISMP Canada in 2007 as a Medication Safety Specialist and received her BSc. (Pharm.) from the University of British Columbia. She is actively practicing in a community hospital as a clinical pharmacist and has had close to 20 years of experience in community and acute care settings. Alice is involved in medication safety, incident analysis and has a passion for engaging consumers and health care practitioners in safe medication practices.

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