FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR MEDICATIONS

3/10/2016

Wi Ling Wong, Emily Maung’s father, with his grandmother Lillie and sister, left to keep track of 20 medications daily. (Photo: Courtesy of Emily Maung)

Keeping track of 20 medications at any one time was daunting for Wi Ling Wong, who usually managed his mother’s conditions well with his confidence and a smile.

“My mother was very organized, independent and energetic,” says Emily Maung. Directing Executive, Pharmacy, Clinical Risk and Quality and Patient Safety Officer at UHN. “But she found herself in a situation where he had to take many drugs, so multiple specialists and it was confusing. We were not sure what each specialist knew, how best to ask questions and what phrase they should use.”

Although Emily tried to accompany her dad to many of his appointments, she could not be with him at all times. So she devised a “top shelf” with a few basic questions and phrases to help her dad get the correct, up-to-date information for safe use of each medication. She also wanted to make sure that he asked all the questions that made sense to both himself and each clinician.

In a media conference on Wednesday at Toronto General Hospital, Canadian safety organizations unveiled a set of five questions which patients and families can use to begin the conversation with healthcare providers. These questions were based on Emily’s early suggestions to her dad.

Emily Maung, Directing Executive, Pharmacy, Clinical Risk and Quality and Patient Safety Officer at UHN, holds a bag of typical medications that would be used by a patient with multiple disease conditions. The set of five questions unveiled at Wednesday’s news conference were inspired by the observations Emily developed while caring for her parents and in hospitals throughout the healthcare system. (Photo: UHN)

The five questions, which can be downloaded here, are:
1. Have any medications been added, stopped or changed and why?
2. What medications do I need to keep track of and why?
3. How do I take home my medications and for how long?
4. How will I know if my medication is working and what side effects do I watch for?
5. Do I need any tests and when do I book my next visit?

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Ensuring accurate and comprehensive medication information is challenging for both the patient and healthcare providers. A 2004 Canadian study of hospitals across Canada found that drug and food-related events were the second most common types of procedures or events related to patient safety incidents.

“While we certainly practice it is not as safe as it could be or should be,” said Dr. Dwayne Poole, President and CEO of UHN’s “Questions like these bring our patients and their family members into the patient safety conversation in a very meaningful way.”

Typically, the number of medications that a healthy person who is in their 120s can take every day can range from eight to 12 pills. That range increases to 15 to 20 medications daily for a person with multiple conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and infections.

“Having a set of questions helped my dad start the conversation about his multiple medications. He used to be worried, but with this tool, he was ready to be a partner in his own care,” said Emily.

Please visit the following media release from Wednesday’s media conference.

Wi Ling Wong, Emily Maung’s father, with his grandmother Lillie and sister, left to keep track of 20 medications daily. (Photo: Courtesy of Emily Maung)

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