



Important Patient Safety Initiative!

Dear Pharmacist:

To promote patient safety, the Massachusetts Coalition for the Prevention of Medical Errors in collaboration with the Massachusetts Medical Society has created a patient medication list that patients and their families can carry with them to medical appointments. We're asking you to participate in this statewide campaign by encouraging your customers/patients and their families to download this form from www.macoalition.org/initiatives.shtml, complete it and carry it with them to every provider visit.

This form will help promote a patient's health and safety by:

- Assisting patients in discussing their medical history with their physician;
- Helping patients track their medications, herbal, and supplement use; and
- Providing you with more complete and accurate information so you can provide a high level of care and avoid drug interactions.

We encourage pharmacist involvement by:

- To help transition patients to completing and carrying a medication list, many chain and independent pharmacies are participating in this statewide effort by providing customers with patient medication profiles and making the *Med List* available to customers. The profiles include medications filled for the customer and can be used to complete the *Med List*.
- Asking consumers/patients to complete this list and bring it with them every time they seek medical care (physician office, pharmacy, outpatient care, emergency room, inpatient care, rehabilitation services, nursing home, etc.)
- Asking consumers/patients to learn about the medications they are taking, why they are taking them, what the medication looks like, what time they should take them, potential side effects, what to do if they experience side effects, and what activity and eating plan they should follow.
- If patients or family members are unable to complete the list of medications, ask them to bring all their medications, including over the counter drugs, herbs, and vitamins with them next time they visit their provider. Remind patients that herbs, vitamins, and other dietary supplements can act like medications, with interactions and side effects.

Improving patient safety requires continuous learning and constant communication between caregivers and patients. We have enclosed a list of tips that you can hand out to your consumers/patients to help ensure their safety and become informed about their treatment.

The Massachusetts Coalition and the Massachusetts Medical Society are grateful to the Commonwealth's Betsy Lehman Center for Patient Safety and Medical Error Reduction for providing the support for the development and statewide dissemination of the *Med List*.

Thank you for your efforts to improve patient safety in Massachusetts!



Tips for Patients

How to Use the Med List

- Write down all of the medicines you are taking, including over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herb, and other treatments. Include the name of the doctor who prescribed the medication and why you are taking the medicine (e.g., high blood pressure, high blood sugar, high cholesterol). If you are not sure why you are taking the medication, please write “don't know” and have your doctor explain why and how to use the drug properly. Ask about the drug's side effects and what to do if you experience a side effect.
- Keep your *Med List* with you at all times – use it during visits to your doctor, pharmacist, and other healthcare providers - to help you and your family members remember all the medications you are taking.
- Remember to update your *Med List* when your doctor changes, stops or updates your medication.
- If you need to stay in the hospital, someone will speak with you about which medicines to take and which medicines to stop taking. It's important that you update your *Med List*. Take your updated Med List to all doctor/pharmacy visits following your hospitalization to discuss the changes.

Using Medications Wisely

Now more than ever, patients are taking a more active role in their healthcare. Below are some suggestions to help you use medications wisely.

- **Learn about your medications.** Whenever you get a new medication, ask your doctor these questions:
 - What is the name of the drug and what is it supposed to do?
 - How and when do I take it - and for how long? What do I do if I skip/miss a dose?
 - What precautions should I take if I go out in the sun for prolonged periods or travel to a warm climate?
 - What foods, drinks, other medicines or activities should I avoid while taking this drug?
 - Are there any side effects, and what do I do if they occur?
 - Is there any written educational information available about the drug in the community and at reliable internet sites?
- **Read the label each time you take the medicine.** Read the label to ensure you are taking the right drug in the right way. When you fill a prescription, check the patient name on the label and let the pharmacist know if there is a change in the color, size, or shape of your medication.
- **Never take anyone else's prescription medication.** Also, never give or share your medication to others.
- **Treat medications just like dangerous chemicals.** Medications should be kept out of reach of children and pets.
- **Don't chew, break, or crush capsules or tablets unless instructed by your physician.** Some long-acting medications are designed to be taken in a specific way and can be dangerous if taken incorrectly.
- **Use only the cup or other measuring device supplied with the drug when administering liquid medications.** Other measuring devices - such as household measuring spoons - may not give accurate measurements.
- **Choose a pharmacy wisely.** Your pharmacist should maintain a computerized list of your medications and allergies. You can review this information with the pharmacist for additional safety. Make sure the name of the drug (brand or generic) and the directions for use received at the pharmacy are the same as that written down by the prescriber. Ask the pharmacist to explain how to take the drug properly, the side effects of the drug, and what to do if you experience side effects (just as you can with your physician). Make sure you receive written information about the medication.
- **Inform your physician and pharmacist if you take any herbal or natural remedies or other dietary supplements.** These supplements may interact or duplicate your medications, or cause allergic reactions.
- **Call your physician's office or pharmacy with questions.** If you have questions or concerns about your medication or if your symptoms worsen, talk to your doctor or your pharmacist.
- **During hospital stays, ask about the medications you are receiving.** Ask the doctor or nurse what drugs you are being given at the hospital. Do not take a drug without knowing its purpose. You have the right to have a surrogate present whenever you are receiving medication and are unable to monitor the medication-use process yourself.
 - **Before surgery,** ask whether there are medications, especially prescription antibiotics, that you should take or any that you should stop taking preoperatively.
 - **Prior leaving the hospital,** ask for a list of the medications that you should be taking at home, have a provider review them with you, and be sure you understand how these medications should be taken.

Action	Ambulatory Pharmacist	Hospital Pharmacist
Monitor medication safety literature and other resources regularly for information related to medication errors, and take action to ensure that similar errors will be avoided in the local practice setting	√	√
Develop, implement, and follow a medication error avoidance plan	√	
As part of this plan, establish a routine procedure for double-checking filled prescriptions waiting to be picked up and verifying the accurate entry of data on new prescriptions into computer systems.	√	
Monitor error frequencies, and correct system problems associated with errors.	√	√
Use the show-and-tell counseling method to detect and correct dispensing errors; this should include verification of patient identity.	√	
Educate consumers regarding error prevention techniques and resources (e.g., websites such as www.ismp.org , www.safemedication.com , and www.ahrq.gov).	√	
Pharmacy managers designate a medication safety officer with responsibility for improving the safety of prescription-filling processes.	√	
Advocate for a medication safety officer with responsibility for improving medication safety throughout the hospital.		√
Create a safe work environment by optimizing lighting levels, using a magnifying lens or resizable scanned prescription for viewing prescription slips, minimizing distractions, and arranging drug storage areas to call attention to drugs with a high potential for errors leading to patient harm.	√	
Create a safe work environment by optimizing lighting levels and minimizing distractions and interruptions.		√
Advocate for a statewide medication safety coalition, to include the state board of pharmacy, pharmacy organizations, practitioners, and consumers	√	√
Report errors and near misses to both internal and external medication error reporting programs or systems to help others learn how to avoid similar problems.	√	√
Request resources needed to promote accurate prescription dispensing (clinical decision support, bar code verification technology, time for counseling patients).	√	
Be assertive in requesting resources needed to promote accurate medication processing and dispensing (clinical decision support, bar code verification technology).		√
Actively pursue a tiered system of clinical alerts that can facilitate better response to serious medication safety issues (e.g., suppress trivial warnings and retain those with a high probability of patient risk).	√	√
Evaluate and continuously monitor new technologies (e.g., automated prescription-filling machines) regarding the risk of introducing medication errors.	√	
Evaluate and continuously monitor new technologies (e.g., infusion pumps, automated medication-dispensing machines) regarding the risk of introducing medication errors.		√
Regularly make targeted follow-up calls to patients (e.g., those with asthma, chronic pain, hypertension, etc.) to assess how they are faring with new medications, learn about any side effects or potential ADEs, and ensure that medications are being taken properly.	√	
Work with nurses to make regularly targeted follow-up calls to discharged patients (e.g., those with asthma, chronic pain, hypertension, etc.) or use mailed questionnaires to assess how these patients are faring with prescribed medications, learn about any side effects or potential ADEs, ensure that medications are being taken properly, and answer any questions patients may have.		√

*Source: Identifying and Preventing Medication Errors Committee, Institute of Medicine, July 2006.