**Patient counselling**

Patient counseling is a key competency element of the Pharmaceutical Care process. Given the advertising for medication in the media and easy access to information on the Web, it is important for pharmacists to provide appropriate, understandable and relevant information to patients about their medication. The pharmacist is in a highly visible and readily available position to answer patient concerns and enquiries about their medications and alternate treatments they may read about or hear from others. Counseling may be defined as “a one-to-one interaction between a pharmacist and a patient and/or caregiver. It is interactive in nature. It should include an assessment of whether or not the information was received as intended and that the patient understands how to use the information to improve the probability of positive therapeutic outcomes.”

Routinely, effectively and, in consideration of the above two statements, appropriately educate patients on the following when dispensing prescription and non-prescription drugs, when patient counseling on discharge medications or when providing recommendations about management of specific drug related problems:

* name and class of the drug (e.g. antibiotic, pain reliever)
* directions for use including education about drug devices
* special storage requirements ß common or important drug-drug or drug-food interactions
* the reason for the drug and the intended therapeutic response and associated time frames. (It is recognized that pharmacists do not always have access to the therapeutic indication for the drug).
* common or important side effects and associated time frames
* what the patient should do to monitor his/her therapeutic response or development of side effects
* actions the patient should take if the intended therapeutic response is not obtained or side effects develop
* when appropriate, the actions the pharmacist will undertake to monitor the patient's progress

Counseling area

The patient should be counseled in a semi-private, or private, area away from other people and distractions, depending on the medication(s). The patient should perceive the counseling area as confidential, secure and conducive to learning. This helps ensure both parties are focused on the discussion, and minimizes interruptions and distractions. It provides an opportunity for patients to ask questions they may be hesitant to ask in public. Documentation

The counseling session should be documented. This may be as simple as a check list or as detailed as recorded notes in the patients’ medication profile. Any follow-up required should be noted. It should also be recorded if the patient does not wish to be counseled.

Summary

The counseling process, properly implemented and consistently maintained, will result in the following benefits/outcomes:

- Improved patient understanding of their medication, resulting in increased compliance

- Reinforcement of advice from primary health care team

- Those patients most in need given more attention

- Improved job satisfaction for pharmacists

- Improved patient loyalty

- Improved pharmacist-prescriber relationships

- Ability to demonstrate quality of service provided when requested by outside agencies