



Michigan Pharmacists

A S S O C I A T I O N

News Release

March 31, 2007

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PHARMACISTS, PHARMACY TECHNICIANS AND PATIENTS PLAY IMPORTANT ROLES IN MEDICATION SAFETY

Much media attention has been focused on the occurrence of medication errors. While medication errors are certainly disturbing, there are many steps that can be taken by pharmacy staff, and even by patients, to help minimize the risk of these errors. The Michigan Pharmacists Association (MPA) offers the following information on the role of pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and patients in preventing medication errors.

Pharmacists, who are both medication experts and the most accessible healthcare professionals, have extensive education and training in how medication works in the body. These professionals are responsible for and required by law to review the work of pharmacy technicians who have actually filled prescription vials and typed prescription labels.

Pharmacy technicians receive on-the-job training and, often, they complete specialized educational programs at a community college or technical school. Most pharmacy technicians are careful and conscientious when filling prescriptions and many have a certified pharmacy technician (CPhT) designation, which means they have been determined competent as a result of passing a national certification examination. Though there is currently no requirement for technician certification in Michigan, MPA has been a long-time supporter of mandatory certification of pharmacy technicians and has recently had discussions with the Michigan Department of Community Health and Governor Granholm's office to help advance this goal.

Both pharmacists and technicians fulfill critical roles in the pharmacy. Pharmacy technicians fill prescriptions, which allows pharmacists to spend more time counseling patients about their medications and disease states. Because of this system, pharmacists are also free to use their expertise to answer patients' questions and give specialized instruction to patients. Additionally, the pharmacist then has adequate time to carefully review prescriptions leaving the pharmacy to ensure no errors have been made; patients are receiving the most appropriate, safe and effective drug therapy; and that dangerous interactions between medications, herbal and over-the-counter products and foods are avoided.

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Though pharmacy staff do everything they can to prevent medication errors, it is also the responsibility of individual patients to assist with the process. The following are things patients can do to increase the likelihood of safe and effective medication use.

- Carry a list of all medications (including nonprescription medications and herbal supplements) you are currently taking to share with your doctor and pharmacist.
- When you are aware of any allergies to medications, share this information with your doctor and pharmacist.
- Ask your pharmacist any question you have regarding your medication, even if you don't want to "bother" him or her.
- Report any unexpected side effects or symptoms as soon as possible to your doctor or pharmacist, even if you think they are unrelated to your medication.
- Take time to learn the names, dosage and schedule for taking your medications.
- Tell your pharmacist and doctor how you are taking your medication, particularly if it is different from the written directions.
- Ask for preprinted, written information on new medications, or ask the pharmacist to write down information for you so you can reference specific instructions later if you forget them.
- Clarify directions for taking a new medication with the pharmacist by repeating them as you have understood them and allow the pharmacist to confirm.
- Question anything you don't understand or that looks different or not right. Ask for clarification on changes (e.g., pills look different, dosage strength is different, directions for taking are different) to your medication refill.

By working together, patients and pharmacy staff can help ensure that patients are receiving safe and effective medication therapy. Enhanced communication and diligence on the part of pharmacy technicians, pharmacists and patients will go a long way toward preventing potentially dangerous medication errors.

The MPA, serving over 3,000 pharmacy professionals, strives to be a leader in professional and scientific advancement by following its mission of encouraging and supporting its members as the professionals responsible for the delivery of patient-focused care.

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