

**Taking a patient's medication history**  
by Marie McCullagh & Ros Wright

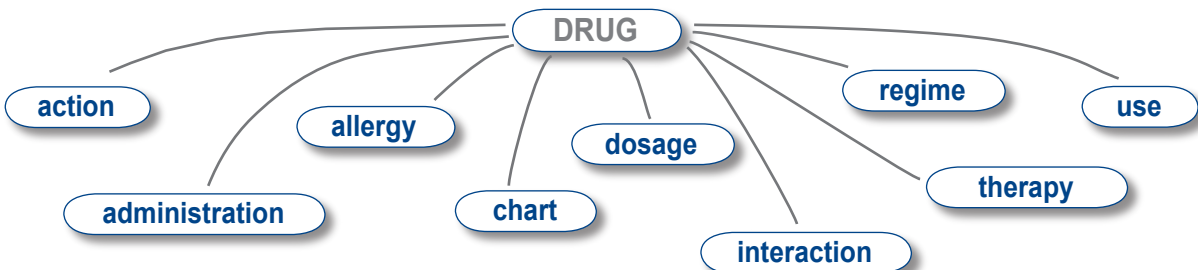
**A Pre-reading**

Tick ✓ the boxes that are correct for *you* and then discuss your responses with a partner.

- I have already taken a patient medication history in English.
- I feel confident carrying out a patient medication history in English.
- I am worried I won't understand prescriptions written in English.
- I am unsure about how to write out a prescription in English.

**B Word building**

1. With a partner, choose five collocations using the noun 'drug' and put each one into a sentence.



- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
- d) \_\_\_\_\_
- e) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Some of these can be found in the text. Skim the text to check your answers and see the context in which they are used.

**C Comprehension check**

Which of the sentence endings do you think are true? (More than one may be possible.)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1. An effective medication history should always include questions about the patient's ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. ... drug allergies. <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>b. ... food allergies. <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>c. ... family members. <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>d. ... vitamin intake. <input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul> <p>2. To avoid errors, a prescription should ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. ... never be rewritten. <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>b. ... always be typewritten. <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>c. ... be legible. <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>d. ... always include a duration period. <input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul> | <p>3. If necessary, a nurse should ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. ... indicate if a drug should be taken with meals. <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>b. ... closely monitor all patient drug use. <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>c. ... indicate the time of drug administration. <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>d. ... ask for a prescription to be rewritten. <input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul> <p>4. Telephone orders ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. ... can be taken by nurses of a certain grade. <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>b. ... must include reference to the fact it was taken by phone. <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>c. ... can be signed by a doctor later on during the shift. <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>d. ... can be taken twice. <input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul> |
|---|--|

Now read the text. As you read, tick ✓ all the points that apply to the statements **according to the text**. Do you agree with the text?



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### Taking a patient's medication history

The nurse is responsible for assessing, planning, implementing and evaluating drug therapies as well as educating patients about their drug regimes. It is more than a mechanistic task, requiring thought and the exercise of professional judgement. To be effective, the nurse must have an understanding of the fundamental principles of drug action, the purposes of drug use and the nursing actions necessary to bring about beneficial outcomes.



Before any medication is administered, it is important that the nurse carries out a detailed assessment of the patient, including:

- medications that the patient is currently taking
- their frequency and dosage
- any home remedies being taken
- other complementary therapies being used
- allergies to any drugs
- health, weight, blood pressure, temperature and respiration [...]
- general fitness and health [...]
- diet [...].

In hospitals, medicines should not be administered without a written prescription and all prescriptions should include information necessary for the safe administration of the drug. The drug chart should detail the name of the patient, the date the prescription was written and the signature of the prescriber, the medication and dosage, the route for administration as well as the time of administration and any specific information, for example that it is to be taken with meals.

Prescriptions are normally written on a standard prescription sheet. In a study of medication prescription orders, Winslow (1997) found that 78 per cent of signatures were illegible or legible only with effort, thus increasing the risk of medication errors and patient harm. The nurse should not administer any drug if the prescription is illegible. It is important that all records of prescribed medications be kept together to prevent drug interactions and overdose and for monitoring purposes. The following criteria should be adhered to in order to prevent errors:

1. The prescription must be legible and the approved or generic name should be used.
2. Details of the client's name and address, the dosage required and the frequency and route of administration must be clearly stated. For certain drugs (for example antibiotics), the proposed duration of therapy should be stated.
3. Controlled drugs [...] should be clearly monitored.
4. A prescription should not be altered once it has been written and should be written out in full again if a change in dose or frequency is indicated.
5. When a prescription is to be cancelled, it should be crossed out and signed and dated by the doctor.
6. In emergencies, telephone orders for the administration of medicines can be accepted by a first-level registered nurse if the doctor is unable to attend the ward. The prescription must then be written and signed by the nurse, stating that it is a verbal prescription. The doctor's name should be recorded on the prescription sheet and the doctor should sign the prescription as soon as possible. No telephone orders should be repeated.

Adapted from *Foundations of Nursing Practice* (3rd Edition), edited by Richard Hogston and Barbara A. Marjoram: Palgrave Macmillan (2008). Reproduced with permission from Palgrave Macmillan.

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**D Vocabulary development**

1. The use of the word 'drug' has certain connotations in English. Decide if you would use the word with a patient. Why? Why not?
2. Using a dictionary, check possible alternatives.

**E Discussion**

1. In small groups discuss what effect the following might have on a patient in terms of their drug regime:

alternative medication / blood pressure / body mass / certain diets / emaciated body type

2. Present your ideas to the rest of the group.

**F Follow-up**

Investigate legislation in a country in the English speaking world regarding controlled drugs and guidelines for procedures in the case of drug errors. Keep a record of where you found the information.

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### ANSWER KEY

#### A Pre-reading

This kind of self analysis can be useful for both learner and trainer. It also serves as an introduction to the article.

#### B Word building

2. Examples from the text are as follows:
- *The nurse is responsible for assessing, planning, implementing and evaluating drug therapies as well as educating patients about their drug regimes.*
  - *To be effective, the nurse must have an understanding of the fundamental principles of drug action, the purposes of drug use ...*
  - *The drug chart should detail the name of the patient, ...*
  - *It is important that all records of prescribed medications be kept together to prevent drug interactions ...*

*Drug administration* and *drug allergy* are also possible, although do not appear in this text.

*Controlled drugs* is another collocation that does appear in the text. The format is adj + noun as opposed to noun + noun as in the other examples.

#### C Comprehension check

1. a, b, d  
c. It is not vital to ask about the health of family members during the patient medication history.
2. a, c  
b. The author does not insist on typewritten prescriptions.  
d. Prescriptions for antibiotics require a duration, but this is not true for all medication.
3. a, c, d  
b. Not all medicines require close monitoring. Opiates, etc. require close monitoring by the nurse.
4. a, b, c  
d. Telephone orders cannot be taken more than once.

N.B: *Suggest that your learners read the statements carefully before responding.*

#### D Vocabulary development

1. The word 'drug' has a negative connotation for many people as it can refer to illicit / illegal drug taking – taking class A drugs such as heroin and cocaine for example or 'soft' drugs such as marijuana. A nurse would have to take care when asking about drug use. *Are you taking any medication?* is a safer question than *Are you taking any drugs?*
2. *medication* (*medications* or '*meds*' – American English) / *medicine* / *prescription drugs* / *over-the-counter drugs*. Illicit drug use can be referred to as *recreational drug use* or *drug abuse* depending on the attitude of the speaker.

NB: *It is important to point out to your learners that this does not signify they are condoning drug use.*

#### E Discussion

Encourage your learners to put their existing medical and nursing experience and knowledge into practice.

Possible answers:

- Interactions can occur with combinations of certain drugs and alternative medications.
- Side effects can affect blood pressure.
- Some drug dosages are calculated on body mass.
- Certain foods can react negatively with some drugs.
- The general fitness of a patient can influence decisions about routes of drug administration – an emaciated patient might not be able to tolerate deep intramuscular injections.