

Taking a patient's medication history

by Marie McCullagh & Ros Wright

A Pre-reading

Think about the information you would need to check before administering a drug to a patient.

B Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these words from the text.

adhere to generic	administer illegible	allergy outcome	alter overdose	complementary route
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1. An _____ is a result or effect of an action.
2. To _____ a drug is to give it to someone or to cause someone to receive it.
3. A _____ therapy is something which is additional to ordinary medicine.
4. An _____ is a condition which develops from eating certain foods or touching certain substances.
5. The _____ of administration is the way in which the drug gets into the body.
6. If something is _____, it cannot be read.
7. An _____ is when somebody is given or takes too much of a drug.
8. To _____ instructions means to follow them without making any changes.
9. A drug is _____ when it is not marked with a brand name.
10. To _____ something is to make changes to it.

C Comprehension check

Before you read the text, think about which of the following statements are true.

1. While an understanding of the fundamental principles of drug use is helpful, it is not essential in order for a nurse to be effective.
2. In a hospital setting, it is routine for medicine to be administered without a written prescription.
3. Prescriptions usually come in a wide range of formats.
4. In an emergency, it is acceptable for a first-level registered nurse to accept a telephone order for the administration of medicines, if the doctor is unable to attend the ward.
5. There are no circumstances under which a nurse can write and sign a prescription.

Now read the text and check your answers. Write T (true) or F (false) next to each of the statements.

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The nurse is responsible for assessing, planning, implementing and evaluating drug therapies as well as educating patients about their drug regimes. It is a task that requires 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 pictures below show three areas which can be affected by side effects resulting from the administration of drugs. Fill in the labels on the pictures.



a) *w* _____ *t*



b) *s* _____ *p*



c) *e* _____ *s*

2. Fill in the gaps below to make words which describe the side effects related to the areas above.

- a) *an* _____ *ty*; b) *d* _____ *ness*; c) *de* _____ *ion*; d) *i* _____ *mania*; e) *irr* _____ *ity*; f) *s* _____ *ness*; g) *t* _____ *ness*;
h) *w* _____ *g* _____; i) *w* _____ *l* _____

3. Match each of the side effects below with the appropriate explanation.

bruising	dizziness	itching	nausea
rash	sneezing	swelling	wheezing

- a) _____ - sick feeling in stomach which makes you feel like vomiting
- b) _____ - air coming suddenly and noisily out of the nose
- c) _____ - where the skin has not been broken but is darker in colour; can be deep red, blue or black
- d) _____ - a feeling in the head that everything is spinning round and you are losing balance
- e) _____ - small red spots on the skin
- f) _____ - an uncomfortable feeling on the skin which makes you want to rub it with your nails
- g) _____ - noise from the chest caused by shortness of breath
- h) _____ - an increase in size

E Discussion

Can you think of any problems you may encounter in trying to get information from patients on the medications or herbal supplements they are currently taking? Think of one way you might overcome this.

F Follow-up

Use a search engine or a reference book to look up the following drugs. You could also use <http://medlineplus.gov/> or <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/>. Make a note of the main conditions they are used to treat and the form that they come in. Keep a record of where you have found the information.

- Azelastine
- Mefloquine
- Fluoxetine
- Zidovudine



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ANSWER KEY

B Key words

1. outcome
2. administer
3. complementary
4. allergy
5. route
6. illegible
7. overdose
8. adhere to
9. generic
10. alter

C Comprehension check

1. F
2. F
3. F
4. T
5. F

D Vocabulary development

1. a) weight, b) sleep, c) emotions
2. a) anxiety, b) drowsiness, c) depression, d) insomnia, e) irritability, f) sleepiness, g) tiredness, h) weight gain, i) weight loss
3.

a) nausea	- sick feeling in stomach which makes you feel like vomiting
b) sneezing	- air coming suddenly and noisily out of the nose
c) bruising	- where the skin has not been broken but is darker in colour; can be deep red, blue or black
d) dizziness	- a feeling in the head that everything is spinning round and you are losing balance
e) rash	- small red spots on the skin
f) itching	- an uncomfortable feeling on the skin which makes you want to rub it with your nails
g) wheezing	- noise from the chest caused by shortness of breath
h) swelling	- an increase in size

E Discussion

It can often be difficult for patients to remember the name of the drugs or herbal supplements they are taking, particularly if they are stressed by being in a hospital or surgery. However, while they may not be able to tell you the name, they can usually tell you the condition they are taking it for. Using the name of the condition, it is possible to look up the drugs or supplements that are used to treat it. The patients can then try to recognise the name from the list, which is easier for them than having to recall it. Patients' partners or relatives may also be able to help if they are present.

F Follow-up

Mefloquine is used for treating or preventing malaria. It usually comes in tablet form.

Azelastine is mainly used for treating hay fever. It comes in a spray form.

Fluoxetine (also known as Prozac) is used for treating depression. It comes in capsule form.

Zidovudine (also known as Retrovir or AZT) is used for treating HIV. It comes in liquid form.