

Ten questions patients are being encouraged to ask (are you proactively answering them?)

By W. Ray Bullman

The communication gap between healthcare providers (HCPs) and patients has been met with its fair share of **commentary**^A, **research**^B, and **critique**^C. One thing we can likely all agree on: For patients to safely use their medications—and reap the most benefit—they need a clear understanding of how and when to take them and what to be on the lookout for in terms of potential risks and side effects. Studies have shown that all too commonly, patients lack key information or are not aware of risks associated with the medications they take. Clear communication at the start of a new drug regimen can help maximize the helpful effects and minimize possible adverse effects of medications.

With the ultimate goal of reducing adverse drug reactions and improving medication adherence, the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE), in collaboration with the FDA, launched the **Talk Before You Take**^D (TBYT) public education initiative to increase medication safety communications between HCPs and patients. TBYT encourages patients to proactively ask, and HCPs to proactively address, 10 questions about all new medications prescribed:

1. What's the name of the medicine, and what is it for?
2. How and when do I take it, and for how long?
3. What side effects should I expect, and what should I do about them?
4. Should I take this medicine on an empty stomach or with food?



5. Should I avoid any activities, foods, drinks, alcoholic beverages, or other medicines while taking this prescription?
6. If it's a once-a-day dose, is it best to take it in the morning or in the evening?
7. Will this medicine work safely with any other medicines I'm taking, including over-the-counter medicines?
8. When should I expect the medicine to begin to work, and how will I know if it's working?
9. How should I store it?
10. Is there any additional written information I should read about the medicine?

Do you and your teams proactively address these questions with patients when a new medicine is prescribed?

Initiatives to improve medication safety, such as *Talk Before You Take*, are most effective when HCPs are aware and involved. NPWH serves on NCPIE's advisory board and supports its activities to educate and mobilize consumers around safe use of medications. To facilitate clear conversations about medication use, the campaign provides information for HCP offices and handouts for patients, all available at www.TalkBeforeYouTake.org. ●

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Web resources

- A. well.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/31/afraid-to-speak-up-at-the-doctors-office/?_r=1
- B. content.healthaffairs.org/content/31/5/1030.abstract, and critique.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324050304578411251805908228
- C. wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324050304578411251805908228
- D. talkbeforeyoutake.org/