



**International Pharmaceutical Federation
Fédération Internationale Pharmaceutique**

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FIP STATEMENT OF POLICY MEDICINES INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Introduction

There is a range of various sources of information that users of medicines may access on their own. The effectiveness of this information is of importance to the patient, as well as prescribers, pharmacists, the health regulatory authorities and the industry that manufactures the medicines.

Providing unbiased and effective medicines information¹ to patients and carers must be a priority for pharmacists. People who use medicines need oral and or written medicines information. As medication experts, pharmacists are a key information resource for the patient and other health-care providers.

This Statement addresses the objective information that patients need about their medicines. The key challenge for the pharmacist is getting such information to the patient in forms that meet their needs, as well as the needs and abilities of health professionals and the health systems.

The purpose of patient medicines information

The primary purpose of patient medicines information is to assist the patient and health professional in achieving safe and effective use of medicines. This includes providing information that allows the patient to make an informed decision as to the appropriate selection and use of the medicines.

Patients value information about the range of treatments available, relative effectiveness of each, inherent risks if any, and effect on life style of the treatments. Further they need information for ongoing decisions about the management of medicines.

While not every patient wishes to receive written information, those who do want sufficient detail to meet their needs. Patients value the idea of information that is adjusted to the individual patient, and contains a balance of benefit and risk information. Most patients also want to know about the potential of adverse reactions.

Sources of patient information

It is important that there is a range of sources of information that the patient can access, and that health-care professionals are available to assist them in understanding this information.

¹ Raynor et al; Health Technology Assessment 2007; 11 Number 5. Effective patient information is defined as: “Information which improves patients’ knowledge and understanding of treatment, self management of illness and improves health outcomes.”

There are many possible sources of patient medicines information:

- Spoken (from health professionals).
- Medicine leaflets supplied with individual medicines.
- Written medicines information for patient and health professional organisations, health organisations and other organisations that communicate with health-care consumers.
- Internet and other electronic tools.

There is a need for alternate languages and special formats (large type, pictograms, audio versions, Braille) to meet the needs of specific patient populations.

Direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medicines is a controversial subject and is only allowed in a few countries. FIP is opposed to direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medicines.

Best practice in information design

Improving the effectiveness of written medicines information can be addressed by applying key principles of good writing and design. It is important to emphasise that good design and layout are as important as easy to understand content. The level of health literacy (people being able to understand health information) varies by country and even by region within a country. This variation should be reflected in the writing and presentation of health information. Attention should be given to methods of communication other than the usual written or spoken, where appropriate.

Impact on adherence

If relevant and customised information is provided to the patient then adherence may improve.

Expanding regulatory function

Increasingly, authorities are creating guidelines and information about medicines. For example, the European Union (EU) requires comprehensive patient leaflets in all medicine packs, which are written according to strict guidelines. These now have to be tested to ensure they are usable by patients. There are similar requirements in the Western Pacific Region. Also, the USA FDA is now developing a more interventionist role in ensuring high quality of information, and providing more information itself to the public (largely via its website).

Need for further research

Generally, it is observed that there is a lack of research in the area of patient medicines information. There is a need to determine the content, layout, delivery method and timing of medicine leaflets that best meet patient' needs. Also, there is a need to find out how to better incorporate individualisation, and benefit and risk information into such leaflets.

Role of the pharmacist

The pharmacist will continue to play a pivotal role in the provision of reliable and valid written and oral medicines information to patients. As patients increasingly access information from the Internet, pharmacists can act as a guide and interpreter. Spoken information remains the priority for patientsⁱ, but should be closely linked to written information. Both spoken and written information should be tailored to reflect the health literacy of the patient and/or care giver. Pharmacists should ensure that written information is not used as a substitute for discussion. They should also encourage patients to use written medicines information and welcome any questions this may raise. National initiatives can encourage patients to engage with pharmacists and ask questions about their medicines. Pharmacists should also ensure that they collaborate with fellow health professionals, to make sure that patients receive appropriate, consistent, and correct messages.

It is the pharmacists' responsibility to ensure that the information they provide is objective, understandable, non-promotional, accurate and appropriate. Further, the pharmacists can use written material with the medicines as a reminder document to support the spoken information that is given to the patient. Pharmacists should encourage patients to seek objective and accurate information.

Against this background FIP recommends that:

Pharmacists should help patients and carers to obtain and critically analyse information to meet their individual needs. Special attention should be given to topics, such as:

- Applying the same critical analysis to direct promotion by governments and health insurance plans that they do to other information sources.
- Source of all information be available.
- Educating patients on how to use the web-based health-care information (including medicines information) and to strongly encourage them to speak to a pharmacist regarding information they find online.
- Informing patients who do not come into the pharmacy to receive their medicines.
- Encouraging and assisting patients on how they can educate themselves.
- Installing private areas for patient care in pharmacies.
- Patient empowerment and patient responsibility for personal health.

In addition, pharmacists should:

- Engage in public-private partnerships that produce and disseminate objective and valid medicines information for patients.
- Provide information in formats accessible by people from special groups.
- Provide both risk and benefit information.
- Provide patients or carers with critical assessment of medicines information sources.
- Use written information to augment the spoken information provided to a patient.

Member Organisations should:

- Develop strategies that encourage pharmacists and other health-care providers to provide high quality medicines information as well as take an active role in assisting the patient to manage the use of medicines.
- Motivate computer software developers to provide systems, which can give access to accurate and readable medicines information that is customizable so as to be relevant to the specific patient and therapy.
- Organise and promote campaigns on medicines information.
- Work with allied health organisations to develop guidelines for production and use of medicines information materials.

Governments should:

- Develop policies whereby pharmacists are key in informing patients about medicines and encourage people to seek advice from their pharmacists regarding medicines and their use.
- Give pharmacists economic incentives that recognise the pharmacists' value in providing patient medicines information.
- Provide or encourage the development of medicines information guidelines that assure quality information, which is consistent amongst all health-care providers.
- Prohibit direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription medicines.

This statement originated with the Board of Pharmaceutical Practice.
