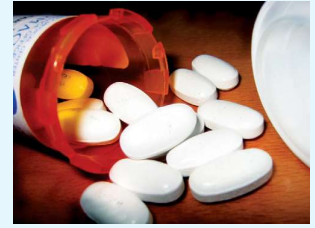


# THE FIRST INTERACTION:

## *What We Have Forgotten As Pharmacists*



**Mohamedali H.H and Bachelani M.A**

I walk into a General Store with a list of items I require and the Shopkeeper glances at the list and proceeds to remove them from the shelves and place them neatly on the counter. He then goes to the cash register to charge those items, occasionally glancing up at me informing me on how good some of the products are or how some of them need to be used, giving basic directions. He then proceeds to pack them nicely in a bag and collects the money, smiling at me to come back again.

This scenario is not only played in a General Store but in Retail Pharmacies in many countries too. Agreed that many of them are run by non-professionals and not Pharmacists but sadly there are places run by professional Pharmacists that have adopted the 'commercialized' version of Pharmacy as a business without any regard to the attributes of this noble profession.

The ultimate focus of any Pharmacist interaction with a Patient should be the Patient's health and well being and in order to fully justify that objective, we as Pharmacists need to conduct ourselves in a more professional manner. They say the first impression matter and in the Pharmacy that could not be more true. Let us discuss how to deal with a new Patient who comes for the first time to your Pharmacy to fill a Prescription.

### **1. Salutation and Introduction:**

How would you feel or what impression would you have of a Shop Keeper who, when you walk into his shop, just looks at you and proceeds to ask what you want without greeting you or introducing himself to you? Are you God to know he is the shopkeeper who can help you? Hence it's important to acknowledge the Patient with a smile and greeting and introduce yourself to him.

'Good Morning Sir / Madam. My name is X and I am the Pharmacist on duty. How may I help you?'

### **2. Identify the Patient and verify the details on the Prescription:**

It is important to verify the Prescription which is handed over to you. Is the name on the Prescription that of the Patient or is the Prescription for someone else?

'This Prescription is for Y, is that you?'  
If the Prescription is for a child proceed to

ask the weight / age of the child. As you are aware children dosages are different from adult ones and are based on mg/kg basis hence it's important to verify that the correct dose has been prescribed.

'And how much approximately does your son / daughter currently weigh?' OR  
'How old is your son / daughter?'

### **3. Confidentiality**

It is important to reassure the Patient that you will not discuss his issues with the whole world, so you may want to ask him to join you in a private area where you can discuss his situation on a one to one basis and without interruption.

'Ok. Mr. / Ms Z, why don't we step into the counseling room, where we can continue our conversation privately'  
OR 'Please have a seat in our private counseling area and we shall continue talking about this.'

4. Find out more about the Prescription and show that you are there to help (Show Empathy)

It is important to know why he is taking a particular Medication as there may be many indications for a drug. Never assume that a Patient is taking a drug for a particular indication. You may be in for a rude shock!! For example I was dispensing a Medication called Metamucil (containing Psyllium husk) to a Patient, and I said, 'This is a Bulk Forming Laxative and it will help to improve your bowel movement and relieve your constipation,' and the Patient got confused. 'But I don't have constipation. I was told to use this Medication as it will help reduce my cholesterol levels!!' (It's therefore important to know why he has been prescribed that Medication and the Patient can inform you upfront or give hints or clues, if only you take the time to find out from him.

'What did the Doctor tell you this Medication is for?'

OR 'What made you go to the Doctor?'

'Oh ok. It sounds like we will try our best to help you. That's what we are here for.'

### **5. Ask Permission to Counsel & Assure Confidentiality**

Certain Patients tend to get defensive when asked questions as they feel you are trying to pry into their personal life, especially in Western countries where the threat of identity theft is rampant. For this reason, it's important to request permission to counsel and explain to them why you need that

information.

'With your permission, I would like to ask you a few questions just to ensure that you will be getting the best benefit from the medication prescribed. I assure you that this information will remain strictly confidential. Is that ok?'

### **6. Ask about Allergies / Sensitivities (A3)**

Ideally, you should ask three things (hence the term A3) to patients about their sensitivities. These are Medication, Food or Other Substances.

'Do you have any Allergies / Sensitivity to any Medications, Food or Other Substances?'

Once you get an affirmative answer, confirm the drug, food or substance. In case a Patient mentions a group e.g. sulfa allergy, confirm the drug.

Can you tell me specifically what the drug / medicine was?'

Thereafter the very next question should be 'Would you please tell me when you took this drug /medicine and what happened when you first took it?'

Sometimes a side effect of a Medication can be mistaken for an allergy. I have had dozens of Patients telling me they are allergic to Penicillin, but upon inquiring, they experience nothing more than diarrhea after using the drug. It is therefore important to differentiate a true allergy from a mere side effect, and educate the Patient accordingly. Probe more about the allergic reaction-For example if the Patient says that he developed a rash after taking a Medication

'Where was the rash? How did it first appear? It must have been terrifying for you when you first observed it. Show empathy; 'When did this happen?' (Immediately after taking the Medications, few hours, few days or few weeks / months after taking it) 'What did you do when you saw the rash?' 'What did the Doctor tell you to do?'

### **7. Ask about any Medical Conditions (MC)**

'Do you suffer from any other Medical Conditions that I need to be aware of, for example High Blood Pressure or High Blood Sugar? Have you had any recent surgery carried out?'

If yes,

'How long have you had this condition, and what have you been doing for it? When did you go for surgery? What kind of surgery was it?'

## 8. Inquire about Medication

### Usage? (MDN-4)

'Are you currently taking any Medication - Prescription drugs, Over the Counter (OTC) Medication, Herbal supplements or Vitamins / Nutritional supplements?' (4 Types of Medication, hence the term MDN 4)

'What Medication are you on and how long have you been on it?'

'What do you take it for?'

'Do you remember the strength of the Medication?'

'How many times a day do you take it?' 'Has it helped you?' OR 'Do you feel any improvement after taking this Medication?'

We need to remember that what we consider a drug / medicine may not be considered the same by our patients. E.g. Multivitamins, Painkillers, Herbal products / Alternative medicines, Contraceptives etc are not considered typical drugs / medicines by our patients hence need to be probed separately.

## 9. Patients Lifestyle (CASDEP)

It is important to inquire about the Patient's lifestyle as this can also affect the efficacy of the Medication. Smoking acts as an enzyme inducer and may reduce the effect of some drugs. Furthermore, it is strictly contraindicated in women over 35 who are on Combined Oral Contraceptives. Alcohol can interfere with drugs like Metronidazole causing a severe Disulfiram type reaction. It can also interfere with blood sugar, causing hyper or hypoglycemia depending on the Alcohol level. A sedentary lifestyle can prove to be deadly for a heart Patient, certain kinds of diet interfere with certain drugs, for example a diet rich in Vitamin K may prove to be detrimental to a Patient who is on Warfarin. Caffeine may cause a mild increase in blood pressure, and also interfere with the effect of some sleeping pills by acting as a CNS Stimulant. And of course, giving Category X Drugs to a woman who might be pregnant might turn out to be a Pharmacist's worst nightmare.

'I also need to ask you some questions about your lifestyle, as it may affect the way the Medication works.'

C - 'Do you drink Caffeinated beverages such as coffee? How often? How many cups per day?'

A - 'How about Alcoholic beverages?'

How often? How much per day?'

S - 'It may or may not apply to you but I need to ask do you Smoke? How many packs a day? How many years now?'

D - 'Do you follow any special Diet? In other words are you a vegetarian / non vegetarian? Are there any restrictions in your diet that I should be aware of?'

E - 'Do you get a chance to Exercise regularly?'

P - I also need to ask, are you Pregnant or planning to become pregnant? What about nursing?' (This is for women only!! :) Do NOT ask this question to men and geriatric or

post menopausal women!)

If the Patient's lifestyle warrants a change and if he/she is open to discussion, talk to him/her about making the necessary changes. Let them know that you are available if they want to talk about quitting smoking, or reducing their alcohol intake. Tell them you can refer them to a Nutritionist or Training Instructor if they want advice on the best diet or exercise program for them.

## 10. Thank the Patient for his Time

'Well Mr. / Ms X, thank you very much for answering all my questions and giving me the information. Let me check the references / prepare the Medication and I will get back to you shortly.'

To conclude, the following protocol should be followed in gathering information when a new Patient comes to your Pharmacy. Many of us don't practice this in actual life but let's not forget that this is what is required of us and more importantly this is what distinguishes us from other 'commercial' retail shops and 'quacks' around us.

You may argue that we do not have the time to ask such questions especially when we don't even know whether it's worth it or not, since more often than not, the Patient has no clue of what is happening. In other words, simply put, this would not work in my Pharmacy setting. Many of us believe in the old adage that 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do.' That is true in a sense but then remember that our 'Rome' really isn't our immediate environment any more. It includes Pharmacists from all over the world. The world has truly become a Global Village with the advent of social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, and there is so much out there to learn. The learning process never ends.

To recap:

### 1. Introduction:

Good Morning Sir / Madam. My name is X and I am the Pharmacist on Duty. How can I help you?'

### 2. Identification

This Prescription is for Y. Is that you?'

### 3. Confidentiality

Ok. Mr. / Ms X, why don't we step aside this way where we can continue our conversation more privately

### 4. More Information and Empathy

What did the Doctor tell you this Medication is for?'

Oh ok. It sounds like. We will try our best to help you. That's what we are here for

### 5. Request Permission to Probe Further

With your permission, I would like to ask you a few questions just to ensure that you will be getting the best benefit from the Medication prescribed and that information

will remain confidential. Is that Ok?'

## 6. Allergy Information (A3)

Do you have any allergies / sensitivity to any Medication, Food or Other Substances? (A3)

## 7. Medical Conditions

Do you suffer from any Medical Conditions like high blood pressure or high blood sugar that I need to be aware of? Have you had any recent surgery carried out?'

## 8. Medication Usage

Are you currently taking any Medications - Prescription drugs, Over the Counter (OTC) Medication, Herbal Supplements or Vitamins / Nutritional Supplements? (MDN4)

## 9. Lifestyle

I also need to ask you some questions about your lifestyle, as it may affect the way the Medication works.

C - Do you drink Caffeinated beverages such as coffee? How often? How many cups per day?'

A - How about Alcoholic beverages? How often? How many glasses per day?'

S - It may or may not apply to you but I need to ask do you Smoke? How many packs a day? How many years now?'

D - Do you follow any special Diet? In other words are you a Vegetarian / Non Vegetarian? Are there any restrictions in your diet that I should be aware of?'

E - Do you get a chance to Exercise regularly?'

P - I also need to ask you if you are Pregnant or planning to become pregnant. What about nursing?'

## 10. Thank the Patient

Well Mr. / Ms Y, thank you very much for answering all my questions and giving me the information. Let me check the references / prepare the Medications and I will get back to you shortly.

Questions, comments and criticisms are most welcome. I can be reached at hassanali74@hotmail.com

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