

Safe and quality use of medicines

To enable best practice prescribing measures, it is imperative that GPs and clinical staff have access to current guidelines and the latest information on medicines. Patients should be encouraged to understand the rationale for taking medications, and the benefits and risks associated with particular medicines. This will assist patients to make informed decisions regarding their treatment, which generally improves patient compliance with recommended treatment plans.

RACGP 4th Edition Standards

5.3.1 Our clinical team prescribes, dispenses and administers appropriate medicines safely to informed patients.

Assessment methods

- Interviews with GPs and practice staff

GPs and clinical staff should be able to confidently describe, and demonstrate, how they provide medicine information to patients. Ideally, this will include an explanation, and possibly a demonstration, of how staff access resources, such as electronic fact sheets, to provide information on medicines prescribed and medicine safety. Clinical staff should be able to comprehensively explain how they access current medicine information and guidelines when needed, explain how the practice reviews its prescribing patterns in accordance with best available evidence, and how patient medication lists are kept up to date.

- Medical records review

The GP surveyor attending will review medical records, and must see evidence of a current medicine list in each patient's record.

- Direct observation and document review

Staff should also be able to demonstrate how stock is regularly and routinely checked, and surveyors will note if any out of date medicines or other perishable materials are seen at the time of the visit. Surveyors will review hard copy resources if available (for example, medicine fact sheets and leaflets), and undertake a review of Schedule 8 medicines if kept onsite. Please refer to your state's or territory's Schedule 8 fact sheet for further details on Schedule 8 requirements.

Meeting the Standards

To ensure the safe use of medicines, vaccines and other healthcare products, practices need to make sure they do not use perishable materials beyond their expiry dates. It's also important to ensure that medicines, vaccines and other healthcare products are stored appropriately, including being secured where required, such as in the case of Schedule 8 medicines.

The use of Therapeutic Guidelines is considered standard practice, and it is recommended guidelines be available to all clinical staff. Providing patients with information about their medicines will assist them in understanding their medicines and subsequent treatment plan. If a patient cannot understand written language, or if information is not available in the patient's primary language, the use of pictorial media or translators might be appropriate.

GPs need to regularly review the list of a patient's current medications to ensure the list is always up to date and does not inadvertently lead to errors when prescribing medicines or referring the patient to other healthcare providers.

NB: Medication lists cross-references with Criterion 1.7.2 Health summaries and 1.6.2 Referral documents.

Best practice

Practices may find it useful to appoint a designated person to take primary responsibility for the proper storage and security of medicines and other healthcare products. Practices are required to label any medications given to patients to take home from the practice, such as sample medications. While practices should always refer to state and territory guidelines for specific requirements, in general, labels should include: name of medicine; medicine dose; the patient's name (given name & family name); patient's date of birth; instructions for use (how and when to take the medicine); the date and time when the medicine was prepared; and who it was 'Prepared by' and 'Checked by'. This labelling should be signed off by the person responsible, such as the GP. Ideally, all areas of medicine management should be outlined in the practice's policies and procedures manual.