

Fond Du Lac Human Services  
Division Pharmacies



By Nicole Madsen, Pharm.D

We are all in a hurry most of the time – so many things to get done each day. Perhaps you have experienced frustration waiting in line at the grocery store, at the post office, yes, even at the pharmacy. Is it really necessary for a pharmacist to talk to the patient with each medication pick-up? It is more important than most people realize...

One of the most important factors in reducing pharmacy errors is patient counseling. A study at an Arizona Indian Health Service Facility found that patient counseling reduced errors by 90%. This reduction of errors during patient counseling is most likely due to the pharmacist's focused attention on the patient and a break from the "habit," or routine, of other pharmacy tasks. It is important for pharmacists to adopt a "show and tell" technique when providing medications to patients. When the pharmacist shows the medication to the patient while asking the patient pertinent questions, it helps alert the pharmacist to detect an error before it leaves the pharmacy. In addition to reducing the rate of dispensing misfills, counseling and clinical services by pharmacists reduces the overall rate of medication errors.

For new prescriptions, there are three main questions we ask patients:

- ✓ What did the doctor tell you this was for?
- ✓ How did the doctor tell you to take it?
- ✓ What did the doctor tell you to expect from the medication?

We ask these questions to ensure your knowledge as a patient. It is important for you to know what condition each medication is used for, how it is taken and what to watch for. We also need to make sure that the medication is being used for a condition it is meant to treat. For instance, if you were seen for back pain but are getting asthma medications, we may need to get clarification or an explanation from your provider.

For refills, we may ask a variety of questions:

- ✓ What kind of side effects have you had?
- ✓ How many tablets are you taking a day?
- ✓ How many times each day do you take your medication?

We ask these questions to ensure that we are still on "the same page," so to speak. Often, patients may get a phone call from their doctor telling them to change the way they are taking a medication. The pharmacy may have no idea of the change and subsequently continue to fill the medication with the old directions or old dosage.

Patient counseling and question asking are the perfect ways to correct an error before the medication is taken home. Although it may take a bit longer, it is well worth the added wait time to ensure you are getting the right medications and the best care available.