



College of Pharmacists  
of British Columbia

**PRACTICE  
REVIEW  
PROGRAM**



Counselling

# Counselling

**Provide counselling to engage in direct consultation with the patient or his/her representative.**

*Health Professions Act (HPA) Bylaws require a pharmacist to complete this step for every prescription, both new and refills.*

In providing quality care, your responsibility extends beyond simply providing the right patient with the right drug. You need to ensure that the patient knows about the medication they are taking, and understands how to take it appropriately to optimize therapy and promote adherence.

Remember, the **right patient** taking the **right drug** at the **right dose** at the **right time**, BUT in the **wrong way** can still compromise drug effectiveness and patient safety.

Patient counselling should include information on the who, what, where, when and how:

- Patient                      Who is the patient?
- Drug                              What is the name of the medication?  
  What is the strength and dosage form?  
  What is the purpose of the medication?
- Direction                      How should the medication be taken (including  
  duration, frequency and route of administration)?  
  What to do in the event of missed doses?  
  Where to store the medication?
- Precautions                    What are potential adverse drug effects?  
  What are potential food/drug interactions and  
  contraindications?
- Monitoring                    What are the expected outcomes?  
  How to monitor if treatment is effective?  
  What to do if there are unwanted outcomes?  
  When to seek medical attention?  
  Whether there are refills?

Be sure to include any additional information specific to the patient or medication.

Patient
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm identity</li> </ul>

Drug	Directions	Precautions	Monitoring
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name</li> <li>• Strength</li> <li>• Indication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Route</li> <li>• Frequency</li> <li>• Duration</li> <li>• Missed doses</li> <li>• Storage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adverse effects</li> <li>• Food &amp; drug interactions</li> <li>• Contraindications</li> <li>• Steps to take if any of the above are encountered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to monitor response to therapy</li> <li>• Expected therapeutic outcomes</li> <li>• When to seek medical attention</li> <li>• Refill information</li> <li>• Any other information specific to drug/patient</li> </ul>

A complete consult with all the above points can be completed within a few minutes.

Hello, Jenny, I'm going to take a few minutes to go over your medication. Your physician has prescribed MacroBID 100mg capsules. It is used to treat your urinary tract infection. Take one capsule by mouth twice daily, about every 12 hours, for 7 days total, with no refills. It may cause some nausea or upset the stomach, so it's best taken with food so that it will be better tolerated. There is also a chance that it may turn the color of your urine to a darker yellow. If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember; but if it's almost time for your next dose, just skip it. Store this at room temperature away from direct heat and light. You should notice an improvement in the urinary symptoms in the next 2-3 days, and the infection should clear up by the 7 days. If it hasn't, please contact your physician, or give me a call at the pharmacy.

### Best practice tip:

Now, while this above example does fulfill the legal requirements for counselling, it is not the only way, nor necessarily the best way since it does not engage the patient. Try a more interactive way of communicating by taking a “patient-centered” approach to counselling. You can do this by incorporating prime questions.

Hi Jenny, I have here your prescription for 14 capsules of MacroBID 100mg. **What did your physician tell you this was for?**

She told me it's to treat my urinary tract infection.

Yes, it's an antibiotic to treat these types of infections. **How did she tell you to take it?**

She mentioned I should be taking it twice daily for 7 days.

Right, take one capsule about every 12 hours. It may cause some nausea or upset the stomach, so it's best taken with food so it will be better tolerated. There is also a chance it may turn the color of your urine to a darker yellow. If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember, but if it's almost time for your next dose, just skip it. **What else did she tell you to expect from it?**

She said my symptoms should improve over the next few days, and to call her if they aren't cleared by 7 days.

Yes, since there are no refills, if you aren't better after taking this for 7 days, please contact your doctor.

**Where do you usually keep your medications?**

In the medicine cabinet in the bathroom.

That's actually not the best place since it can get quite humid there. It's best to keep this in a hallway or bedroom cabinet instead. That way, it's in a cool dry place away from direct heat and light. Do you have any questions at this time? Otherwise, you can always give me a call if you have any questions or concerns.

Great, thank you.

Asking prime questions allows you to tailor the counselling to make it patient-specific. It gives you insight into what the patient knows or doesn't know, and allows you to build on their current knowledge base by filling in the gaps of information. It also gives you the opportunity to clear up any misconceptions the patient may have about the medication therapy.

Every refill prescription also needs to be counselled by the pharmacist on the following points.

<b>Patient</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm identity</li> </ul>		
<b>Drug</b>	<b>Directions</b>	<b>Monitoring</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Name</li> <li>• Strength</li> <li>• Indication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency</li> <li>• Duration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whether the patient has experienced a drug therapy problem</li> </ul>

This can be done in a way that isn't redundant, especially for patients who have been on the same medication and regimen for a number of years.

Hi Joe, here is another 3-month supply of your Glyburide 5mg tablets. How is the diabetes medication working to control your sugars?

My physician was quite happy with the latest blood lab test that I had last week. He mentioned my blood sugars were within target.

That's great! That's why he's keeping your dose at 1 tablet twice daily as before, and has given you 2 additional refills. You used to get the occasional low blood sugar reaction. Have you still been experiencing them recently?

Very seldom, now that I eat my meals at regular times. And I carry sugar tablets with me wherever I go, just in case.

Good. The weather is getting quite hot now, so just a reminder that Glyburide can cause sun sensitivity—make sure you cover up or use sunscreen outdoors. Other than that, have you had any problems or concerns with your Glyburide?

Well there's the occasional time I forget to take my pills when I stay out late, but I just take it later when I get home.

That's fine as long as you don't double-dose—we don't want your blood sugars to drop too low. Maybe you can consider taking some tablets out with you if you are planning on staying out late. Give me a call if you have any questions.

### Best practice tips:

Every prescription, both new and refill, requires counselling by the pharmacist on their respective requirements. Simply having the pharmacy assistant or technician asking the patient, “Do you have any questions for the pharmacist?” is not acceptable—the pharmacist must provide counselling each time. Similarly, when the pharmacist counsels, simply asking the patient if they have any questions without counselling on all the requirements is not sufficient. Remember, **patients do not know what they do not know**. They do not necessarily know what questions to ask in order to use a medication appropriately.

The pharmacist must always make a direct offer to counsel. If a patient does indeed refuse to be counselled on a medication, this refusal should be documented by the pharmacist on the hardcopy of the prescription.

Any counselling or consultation provided should be done in a manner which respects the patient’s privacy and maintains confidentiality. Depending on how the pharmacy is set up, you may need to move to a more private area first. If there are other people in the vicinity, be conscious about voice volume.

In situations where it’s not possible to provide counselling in person, you may provide counselling over the phone. All the required counselling points must still be covered. If the patient has difficulties with language or communication, you must still use reasonable means to provide counselling.

Remember, in order to completely assess appropriateness of the medication therapy, providing counselling is a critical step. There are times when potential drug related problems are only discovered through counselling. For instance:

- New prescription for Naproxen, but patient had a gastric ulcer several years ago.
- New prescription for Acetaminophen/Codeine 300/30mg--1-2 tablets every 6 hours as needed for dental pain, but patient is currently also taking Acetaminophen 500mg—2 tablets 3 times daily regularly for osteoarthritis.
- Refill prescription for Ramipril, but the patient has been experiencing a dry hacking cough for the past few weeks.
- Refill prescription for Amlodipine at the same dose, but patient had discussed with physician about expecting a dose increase because blood pressure has not been at target.

If any drug related problems are encountered during counselling, they need to be resolved in collaboration with the patient, and may require contacting the practitioner.

Do not assume that patients do not need to be counselled on refill prescriptions since they have been taking the medication for a period of time. Consider the following:

- The patient may not have been appropriately counselled previously.
- The patient may not have completely understood all the points when they had previously been counselled.
- The patient may not remember all the points from previous counselling.

Providing counselling with refills helps to reinforce key points to remind patients about what they need to know to take their medications appropriately.

When counselling on refill medications, simply asking the patient if they have any side effects may not be sufficient. Patients may not necessarily know what side effects they should be monitoring for. As mentioned, patients do not know what they do not know. You can start off with open-ended questions, then narrow in on the specifics. For example:

- ACE-inhibitors—monitor for dry cough
- Statins—monitor for muscle pain or weakness
- Insulin and insulin secretagogues—monitor for symptoms of hypoglycemia.

Any changes in medication therapy needs to be mentioned during counselling. This includes changes in medication, dose, directions, and frequency. This also includes any changes or substitution implemented by the pharmacist:

- Substituting a generic for a brand name drug, or substituting one generic brand for another generic brand.
- Substituting a different dosage strength but keeping the same dose by changing the quantity consumed. For example, a prescription written for Hydrochlorothiazide 25mg tablet—1/2 tablet once daily; being substituted with Hydrochlorothiazide 12.5mg—1 tablet once daily.

Counselling is also the last chance to catch and resolve any potential dispensing errors. “Close calls” or “near misses” are often caught when pharmacists counsel appropriately on the medication. These dispensing errors may sometimes be due to misreading or misinterpreting practitioners’ handwriting, and often involve look-alike or sound-alike medications. Sometimes, potential errors may also occur from patient misunderstandings. Some examples:

- Prescription filled for Paxil 20mg—1 tablet daily. During counselling, the pharmacist finds out the patient was expecting a medication for heartburn. Prescription was written for Pariet 20mg—1 tablet daily, but was misread as Paxil 20mg.
- Prescription filled for Lantus insulin—inject 5 units daily. During counselling, the pharmacist finds that the patient has been using Lantus insulin for a few years, but just moved to BC, so there is no record on PharmaNet. Prescription was written for Lantus—inject 50 units daily, but was misread as Lantus—inject 5 units daily. The injection dose of 50 was misinterpreted as 5U.



- Prescription filled for Warfarin 2mg—take as directed according to INR. During counselling, the pharmacist finds out the patient was told by the physician to take 4mg daily, but had incorrectly assumed he should be taking 4 tablets daily. The pharmacist is able to clear up the misunderstanding by clarifying that the correct directions are to take only 2 tablets daily to attain the 4mg dose.

With the above examples, the potential errors would likely not have been caught if the pharmacist did not provide counselling.

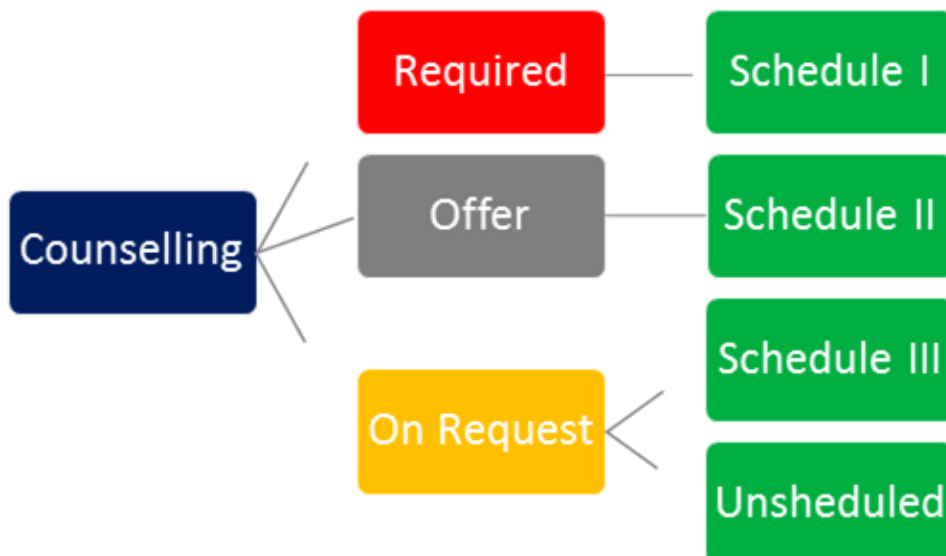
Counselling is usually the last step of dispensing and provides the opportunity for contact between the pharmacist, patient and their medication. In addition to providing full counselling, take the opportunity to open up vials to show the medication to the patient.

- With new prescriptions, patients will get to see the medication they will be taking/using for the first time. This gives them the chance to express any concerns or questions they may have about the medication (eg. they may find the tablets too large to swallow whole).
- With refill prescriptions, patients can verify that the medication is the same as what they have been taking. Conversely, they can inquire right away if the tablets look different from what they were expecting.

Counselling requirements for Schedule II, Schedule III and Unsheduled Drugs:

A pharmacist must offer to provide consultation on Schedule II drugs at the time of purchase.

A pharmacist must be *available* to provide consultation on Schedule III drugs and unsheduled drugs on request.





A pharmacist must consult with practitioners with regards to a patient’s drug therapy. This task cannot be delegated to a pharmacy assistant or technician.

## Who can complete these activities?

	Pharmacist	Pharmacy Technician
Assess & Resolve Drug Therapy Problems	✓	
Counsel & Consult	✓	

For more information, please refer to: HPA Bylaws Schedule F Part 1, section 6, section 12 & section 13.

## Why is this a fundamental standard?

### Case in point:

A mother in the US picking up Tagamet® (Cimetidine) liquid for her 7-week-old child was supposed to administer 0.5ml per dose for acid reflux, but ended up giving 5ml each time. She was given an incorrect syringe by the pharmacy technician, who told her that the 5 on the syringe was 0.5ml. After 4 doses, the child was very drowsy and experienced vomiting and loose stools. The child was brought to the emergency room for observation, and fortunately, didn’t need to be treated.

<https://www.ismp.org/consumers/Counsel.asp>

Pharmacists must be vigilant about counselling to ensure that the patient knows and understands how to take the medication appropriately, including any special instructions. This ensures the **right person** is taking the **right dose** of the **right drug** at the **right time** in the **right way**.

This task **cannot** be delegated to a pharmacy assistant or technician.