

Informing Patients of Medication Side Effects

The Great Lakes Service Center's 2003 ECHO (Experience of Care & Health Outcomes) Survey revealed that only 80.5% of patients receiving medications in 2003 had been informed of the side effects of those medications by their treating physician. Safe and effective medication treatment practices require that physicians inform patients of potential side effects and monitor medication treatment outcomes.

As consumers of healthcare, patients are becoming more involved in matters related to their own care. In an effective therapeutic partnership, the physician's contribution is to prescribe the appropriate medication and to educate the patient about its use.

The patient's contribution is to take medications according to instructions and to report back to the physician both the positive and negative effects. The provision of written information is a good supplement to oral counseling and improves a patients' knowledge about their prescription medicines. Document in the patient's treatment record that an oral counseling occurred and an informational leaflet was dispensed. Before refilling medications, ask and document if patients are taking their medications as prescribed.

Ask patients how they are taking their medications.

If the patient reports unexpected side effects, document why the drug is still appropriate for treatment. Involving the patient and keeping him or her informed every step of the way not only ensures they are a partner in their own care, but can have the added benefit of increased safety.