

# Real-time prescription monitoring: conversation guide

The use of real-time prescription monitoring (RTPM) may require prescribers and pharmacists to engage in conversations about monitored medicines with consumers and other clinicians. Good communication involves using key skills to engage in effective conversations and shared decision-making.

## Elements of good communication

### CONTENT

Focus on facts  
Provide relevant information in a way the person can understand it  
Avoid stigmatising language

### DELIVERY

Speak in neutral tone and volume  
Remain respectful  
Be assertive  
Demonstrate empathy

### PURPOSE

Explain reasons for a decision or concern  
Frame your discussion around concerns for patient safety

### PLACE AND TIME

Ensure privacy  
Minimise physical barriers like a desk or store counter

## Key skills for effective conversations

### ACTIVE LISTENING

- Pay full attention
- Positive body language
- Avoid interrupting
- Repeat key phrases
- Request clarification

### MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

- O** – Open-ended questions
- A** – Affirmation
- R** – Reflecting
- S** – Summarising

### EXPRESSING EMPATHY

- N** – Naming the emotion
- U** – Understanding the situation
- R** – Respecting efforts
- S** – Support during difficulties
- E** – Exploring issues with curiosity

## Conversation prompts

### STEP 1

#### ASK

- Ask for permission to discuss
- Ask open-ended questions to identify knowledge gaps

Example questions:

'I can see in [insert RTPM system] that you had this medicine supplied recently. Can you tell me more about how you are managing the pain?'

'I'd like to discuss some concerns I have about the use of this medicine. Is that ok with you?'

'Tell me more about why this medicine was started?'

### STEP 2

#### TELL

- Provide information clearly
- Express your concerns using 'I' statements

Example statements:

'I can see that you have a few doctors involved in managing your pain and I am concerned that this increases your risk of problems with medicines.'

'I am concerned that this combination of medicines has the potential to cause you a lot of harm.'

'I have noticed that... and I am concerned that some of your medicines might be contributing to this.'

### STEP 3

#### ASK

- Check understanding or agreement
- Invite the person to share feelings or thoughts about your concerns

Example questions:

'How do you feel about the idea of stopping this medicine?'

'How would you feel if we put together a plan to meet your treatment goals?'

'Tell me about other strategies you have used to manage the anxiety/sleep/pain, etc.?'

## Challenging scenarios

Good communication skills become increasingly important when there are signs of escalation. For example, challenging scenarios may arise when a clinical decision about the prescribing or supply of a monitored medicine does not align with the patient's expectation. Prescribers and pharmacists should attempt to recognise and manage conflict as early as possible.

### Defusing conflict

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| ■ Notice and identify the conflict            | ■ Find common ground or a shared goal    |
| ■ Listen actively without judgement           | ■ Respond with empathy                   |
| ■ Invite the other person to share their view | ■ Offer options or solutions to consider |

Adapted from the [VitalTalk guide on conflicts](#).

#### PRESCRIBER

'I do not believe it is safe or appropriate to prescribe the medication you are asking for because ...'

#### PHARMACIST

I understand your situation, however I cannot dispense this medicine because I am concerned ...'



**If a situation threatens the immediate safety of any person; comply with any requests, then contact police, reporting bodies or other care providers when it is safe to do so.**

## Structured communication between clinicians

Strategies for effective communication can also be applied in clinician-clinician interactions. For example, pharmacists may be required to contact a prescriber for several reasons before dispensing monitored medicines. A structured communication tool such as ISBAR may be useful for clear and concise communication:

- **I** – Introduction
- **S** – Situation
- **B** – Background
- **A** – Assessment
- **R** – Recommendation.

## Supporting resources

- RACGP guidelines: [Prescribing drugs of dependence in general practice](#)
- The Commission's [Communicating for safety resource portal](#)

## More information



For more information on RTPM, please visit the [Commission's webpage](#).