

Action 7: Educate patients about antibiotic use

Educating patients and carers about safe and appropriate use of medicines is an important aspect of prescribing and using any medicine. Antibiotics are vital lifesaving medicines, but they differ from other medicines in that their use in one person can influence their future efficacy in the individual and in others.¹ It is important that when they are prescribed, patients and their carers know how to use them appropriately.

Ensuring that patients and carers know and understand appropriate antibiotic use requires clinicians to explain:

- why an antibiotic has been prescribed
- the dose and time(s) the antibiotic is to be administered or taken
- the expected duration of therapy (or how long to take them for)
- whether treatment will need to be reviewed and when this will occur
- possible side effects that may occur and to report these or any other concerns to a clinician.

When prescribing antibiotics, clinicians can explain that antibiotics are important life-saving medicines and that when they are prescribed, it is important for patients and their carers to know how to take them appropriately: if antibiotics are not taken appropriately or taken when they are not needed, it may mean that this antibiotic may not work when it is next needed.

Use resources to educate patients and their carers during hospitalisation, on discharge, and in the community. Antibiotic Consumer Medicine Information leaflets are a suitable resource that can be used to help convey important information about safe antibiotic use. NPS MedicineWise also has a number of useful resources that may help clinicians with educating patients and their carers about appropriate antibiotic use. This education includes explaining: why the antibiotic is needed; when it should be taken and how long it should be taken for; what antibiotic resistance is; what it means to be allergic to an antibiotic; and, that antibiotics should not be shared with other people, or kept for use in the future.

Educating patients and their carers about the role they can play in reducing the emergence, spread and control of antibiotic resistance can help to ensure that antibiotics will continue to work in the future. Encourage patients and their carers to help tackle the problem of antibiotic resistance by educating them about action they can take; for example, educating patients and their carers that colds and flu are caused by viruses and will not respond to antibiotics. This is fundamental in changing the patterns of antibiotic use and the development and spread of

Key points:

- Educate patients* and carers about appropriate antibiotic use
- Use available resources to educate patients and carers
- Inform patients and carers about actions they can take to help address antibiotic resistance

antibiotic.²⁻⁴ Studies show that consumers often believe viral infections such as the common cold and flu can be treated with antibiotics and expects, and sometimes demand prescriptions for antibiotics. This expectation and demand for antibiotic therapy is considered to be one of the drivers of antibiotic resistance.²

Useful resources

Clinicians may find the following resources to be useful when educating patients about appropriate antibiotic use:

- **Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets:** These are available for all prescription medicines available in Australia and should be offered each time an antibiotic is dispensed by the pharmacist. Visit www.nps.org.au/medicines.
- **NPS MedicineWise:** provides other information on antibiotic medicines for consumers as well as information on antibiotic resistance. Visit www.nps.org.au/antibiotic-medicines www.nps.org.au/antibiotic-resistance.
- **NSW Clinical Excellence Commission:** The *Quality Use of Antimicrobials in Healthcare* program has developed a resource titled *Receiving Antibiotics in Hospital*. This resource provides basic information to health consumers about receiving antibiotics in a hospital environment. Visit <http://www.cec.health.nsw.gov.au/programs/quah/antibiotic-awareness-week/>
- **NPS Medicines Line (1300 MEDICINE):** The NPS Medicines Line is a telephone service where consumers can ask questions and be given advice about the appropriate use of their prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines. Visit www.nps.org.au/medicines-line.
- **Antibiotics reminder iPhone app:** The resource was developed by NPS MedicineWise to help consumers remember to take their antibiotics on time. Visit www.nps.org.au/antibiotics-reminder.

The Antimicrobial Stewardship (AMS) Clinical Care Standard.

The Antimicrobial Stewardship (AMS) Clinical Care Standard aims to ensure that a patient with a bacterial infection receives optimal treatment with antibiotics. It provides advice to clinicians, consumers and health services on key components of care related to antibiotic therapy. The AMS Clinical Care Standard is due for publication late 2014. For more information, visit www.safetyandquality.gov.au/ccs

References and further reading

1. Antibiotic Expert Group. *Therapeutic Guidelines: Antibiotic*. Version 14. Melbourne. Therapeutic Guidelines Ltd; 2010 Note: The next edition of *Therapeutic Guidelines: Antibiotic* (version 15) will be published in November 2014.
2. Davey P, Pagliari C, Hayes A. The patient's role in the spread and control of bacterial resistance to antibiotics. *Clinical Microbiology and Infection* 2002;8(Supp 2):43-68.
3. Consumers Health Forum of Australia. *Community Quality Use of Medicines and Diagnostics Project – Consumer and General Practice Use of Antibiotics: A Consumer Information and Discussion Paper*. 2011.
4. Steiner E, Saddler L, Fagan L. Promoting appropriate antibiotic use: teaching doctors, teaching patients. *Californian Journal of Health Promotion* 2004;2(Special Issue):22-30.

Date of publication: 24 October 2014

This document is intended for use by health professionals. It has been created from information contained in *Antimicrobial Stewardship in Australian Hospitals 2011* and reviewed by clinical experts. Reasonable care has been taken to ensure this information is accurate at the date of creation. This fact sheet is intended to be used in its original version and can be downloaded from the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care web page www.safetyandquality.gov.au.

"No action today, no cure tomorrow" is adopted from the WHO World Health Day 2011.