

Medicines Conversation Guide

Pharmacist Toolkit

Introduction

The Medicines Conversation Guide (the *Guide*) is a tool to promote communication between older adults and their healthcare providers about medicines. The aim of the *Guide* is to increase patient involvement in medicines decisions by supporting conversations about:

- General health understanding
- Preferences for information about medicines
- Goals and priorities
- Views on important activities
- Fears and worries
- Trade-offs between potential benefits and harms

It is a flexible tool, that can be tailored by selecting questions that are most relevant for an individual patient and wording can be adapted to suit the communication style of the healthcare provider (see p11-13 for suggestions for rewording of some of the questions).

Our *Medicines Conversation Guide* was adapted from the *Serious Illness Conversation Guide* (developed by Ariadne Labs and Harvard University). It was developed from 2016-2018 by a team of researchers and clinicians from The University of Sydney, Australia. The development and a feasibility evaluation took place as part of a research study which has been published in the following article: Weir K. et al. [Pharmacists and patients sharing decisions about medicines: Development and feasibility of a conversation guide](#). *Research in Social and Administrative Pharmacy* (2018).

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Overview of Materials

- **The Medicines Conversation Guide**

The *Guide* is a series of questions designed to engage patients in discussions about their goals and preferences in relation to their medicines. Our research team have piloted using the *Guide* in conjunction with the Home Medicines Review (HMR) program, and pharmacists reported finding the *Guide* to be an acceptable and useful tool (see [Weir et al 2018](#) for more details). The current research study aims to further investigate using the *Guide* within the HMR program.

- **Template for HMR Summary Table**

The Template aims to help pharmacists to summarise the key points from the HMR at the beginning of the HMR report. Pharmacists can summarise the patient's current medicine regime, their understanding of the directions and indications for use of each medicine, and any symptom-specific goals and preferences expressed by the patient (for example, wish to decrease particular side-effects). There is also a space to note the patient's 'fundamental goals' (such as being able to continue to live independently), should these arise as a result of the questions from the *Guide*.

- **Template for Patient Summary**

The patient summary is intended to be completed by the pharmacist and patient collaboratively at the time of the HMR and given to the patient to keep as a record of what was discussed during the HMR.

- **Strategies for Communication Challenges**

In this section, we provide suggestions for dealing with challenging communication scenarios that we identified in our feasibility study. It includes suggestions for how to respond when patients go off-track from talking about their medicines/health, when patients give short/closed responses to questions, and general troubleshooting advice for using the *Guide* in clinical practice.

Medicines Conversation Guide

This guide is designed to facilitate an engaged discussion with older patients taking multiple medicines about their goals, preferences and priorities in relation to their medicines.

Set up the conversation

- Introduce purpose
- Expectations
- Information preferences

What are your **thoughts** about where you are with your health?

What do you hope will be **achieved** by reviewing the medications you are taking?

Are you interested in hearing much **information** about your medicines?

PROMPT: From me or your doctor? Some patients like to know as little or as much as possible.

Explore key topics

- Goals
- Activities and function
- Fears and worries
- Side effects

What is the **most important** thing for you now?

PROMPT: Or in the near future? Are your medicines helping with this?

What **activities** are important to your life?

PROMPT: Do your medicines fit in with this?

What are your biggest **fears and worries** about your health?

What medicines are helping you **feel better** right now?

PROMPT: Do medicines help with your day-to-day symptoms?

Do you have any **concerns** about your medicines?

PROMPT: About side effects?

PROMPT: About taking multiple medicines?

Check Cognitive Burden

I just want to make sure I'm not **overburdening** you with too many questions?

Make trade-offs

- Making changes
- Side effects/burden

How do you feel about **making changes** to your medications?

Now we are going to work out what **matters most** to you, because different people value different things.

PROMPT: If patient has unwanted **side effects**:

- Some people think side effects such as aching muscles aren't a big deal
- Some people hate having even mild side effects PROMPT: If patient has a high **drug burden**:
- Some people think taking medicines every day is a hassle
- Some people are happy to take medicines
- How much are you willing to accept side effects/hassle of taking medicines?

PROMPT: For the possibility of staying healthier/living longer in the future?

Close the conversation

- Summarise goals/priorities/medicines

Is your **GP aware** of what's most important to you?

I've heard you say that ____ is really important to you. Keeping that in mind, I'm going to summarise your goals/priorities/medicines...

PROMPT: How much does your family know about your health priorities?

HMR Summary Table

This document is for the pharmacist to complete and include in the HMR report for the GP. There is a separate template for a patient summary.

All CURRENT medications – name, strength, directions	Directions and usage (according to patient)	Indication for use (according to patient)	Symptom-specific and/or functional goals and preferences	GP Comments
<i>Example:</i> Sitagliptin 50mg metformin 1000mg (Janumet)	1 bd	diabetes	c/o diarrhoea. Patient wants to reduce this medication as it's impacting on their physical activity	

All CURRENT medications – name, strength, directions	Directions and usage (according to patient)	Indication for use (according to patient)	Symptom-specific and/or functional goals and preferences	GP Comments

Patient’s key goals

E.g. life extension / Preserving independence / Reducing or eliminating pain / Reducing or eliminating other symptoms such as dizziness, fatigue, shortness of breath [Ref: Fried,T.R.; Tinetti,M.; Agostini,J.; Iannone,L.; Towle,V. Health outcome prioritization to elicit preferences of older persons with multiple health conditions. Patient Educ Couns, 2011, 83, 2, 278-282]

Tips for the HMR report

We have conducted an interview study with 32 GPs who use the HMR program. Based on the feedback these GPs gave about their experience, we have compiled a list of tips for what types of information GPs tend to find most useful in the HMR report.

TOPIC	SUGGESTIONS
POLYPHARMACY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indicate if the patient is taking 5 or more medicines• Identify inappropriate medicines
DESCRIBE MEDICINES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compare GP's medicines list with what the patient is taking• Use generic names of medicines, not brand names
HOW THE PATIENT TAKES THEIR MEDICINES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indicate if patient is using a Dose Administration Aid• Mention timing, when is patient taking medicines?• Identify any problems• Comment on the home environment/patient circumstances
RECOMMENDATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Address specific questions the GP has asked in the referral letter• Provide clear points of action• Give practical instructions on how to increase/decrease a medication dosage• Consider cost of medicines• Express recommendations as a suggestion

Patient Goal Summary Template – p1 of 3

What is important to me about my medicines

Discussed during my Home Medicines Review on .../.../... (DD/MM/YY)

Main Message(s)

The main 'take-away' message(s) from my Home Medicines Review today are:

My overall health

My thoughts about where I am with my health

- this was not discussed with the pharmacist
- this was not discussed with the pharmacist but I would like to discuss with my GP
- yes, the pharmacist and I discussed:

Medication review

This is what I'd like to happen by having my medicines reviewed:

- this was not discussed with the pharmacist
- this was not discussed with the pharmacist but I would like to discuss with my GP
- yes, the pharmacist and I discussed:

Patient Goal Summary Template – p2 of 3

Information preferences

I would like to hear more information about my medicines:

- this was not discussed with the pharmacist
 - this was not discussed with the pharmacist but I would like to discuss with my GP
 - yes, the pharmacist and I discussed:
-
-
-

Goals

My most important goals and activities that might affect my healthcare decisions are:

- this was not discussed with the pharmacist
 - this was not discussed with the pharmacist but I would like to discuss with my GP
 - yes, the pharmacist and I discussed:
-
-
-

Fears & worries

My biggest fears and worries about my health are...

- this was not discussed with the pharmacist
 - this was not discussed with the pharmacist but I would like to discuss with my GP
 - yes, the pharmacist and I discussed:
-
-
-

Side-effects

My concerns about my medications are side effects/taking multiple medicines/both:

- this was not discussed with the pharmacist
 - this was not discussed with the pharmacist but I would like to discuss with my GP
 - yes, the pharmacist and I discussed:
-
-
-

Patient Goal Summary Template – p3 of 3

Trade-offs

I know some of my medications have side effects but I don't mind as long as...

EXAMPLES: The side effects don't get any worse, medications are helping me do xyz, etc.

- this was not discussed with the pharmacist
 - this was not discussed with the pharmacist but I would like to discuss with my GP
 - yes, the pharmacist and I discussed:
-
-
-

Medications

These medicines are helping me feel better right now:

- this was not discussed with the pharmacist
 - this was not discussed with the pharmacist but I would like to discuss with my GP
 - yes, the pharmacist and I discussed:
-
-
-

I'd be happy to make changes to these medications if I can:

EXAMPLES: Medicine: Proposed change: (e.g.) reduce, change, stop)

- this was not discussed with the pharmacist
 - this was not discussed with the pharmacist but I would like to discuss with my GP
 - yes, the pharmacist and I discussed:
-
-
-

Share with GP

Other things I would like to discuss with my GP:

- this was not discussed with the pharmacist
 - this was not discussed with the pharmacist but I would like to discuss with my GP
 - yes, the pharmacist and I discussed:
-
-
-

Strategies for Communication Challenges

Patient goes off track from medicines/health

COMMON SCENARIOS

Patient may respond with broad answers unrelated to health or with a specific list of diagnoses.

KEY IDEAS/STRATEGIES

A broad response about a patient's life can be important to gain insight and may be related to function, health and medicines. Strategies to bring the patient back to health/medicines are:

- **Prompt about medicines/health:**
"And how do your medicines fit in with this?"
"How does this fit in with your health?"
- **Bring the patient back to the HMR focus:**
"I know this is hard to talk about, but I'd like to see if we can clarify a couple of things about your health/medicines..."
- **Remind patient of time constraints:**
"I wish we had more time to talk about your new dog, but I would like to get back to thinking about your health/medicines..."
- **Interrupt gently:**
"Mrs. Smith, we need to get back to my question about your health/medicines..."

Patient gives short answers and does not expand

Patient might say they don't want information or give short or one-word answers to open ended questions.

Are you interested in hearing much information about your medicines?

What is the most important thing for you now?

STRATEGIES/KEY IDEAS

Encourage patient to answer by rewording the question or asking in an easier to understand way. Reassure patients that their preferences are important. Acknowledge that some patients prefer not to receive detailed information about their medicines.

- **Reword question:**
"How interested are you in hearing information about your medicines?"
"Who do you usually ask for information about your medicines?"
"What are the things that are important to you at the moment? Is there anything you'd like to change?"
"What are your goals?"
"I'd like to understand a little more about what is important to you. Would that be okay?"
- **Reassure that patient's opinion is important:**
"What do you think about...?"
"What matters to you is important"

Trouble shooting with Conversation Guide questions

COMMON SCENARIOS

Concern that some questions are too forward, might put the patient on the spot or could be upsetting.

What are your biggest fears and worries about your health?

Do you have any concerns about side effects of your medicines?

Trade-offs question

...How much would you be willing to accept side effects/hassle of taking medicines?

Is your GP aware of what's most important to you?

Now I'm going to summarise your goals/priorities/ medicines...

STRATEGIES/KEY IDEAS

It might not be easy to talk about personal things with patients such as their fears and worries. However, our research shows that patients appreciate the opportunity to voice what's on their mind about their health. This will help to understand the patient's motivations and to align care/medications with what matters most to them. It's important not to assume what a patient is concerned about.

Reword question to sound more informal:

"What concerns do you have about your health (if any)?"

"Let's talk about if there's anything worrying you about your health..."

Reword question to sound more informal or open ended:

"Are there any side effects of your medicines that bother you?"

"What side effects of your medicines worry/concern you?"

Strategies for asking this question:

- Ask only if there are medications that could potentially be deprescribed (stopped/reduced).
- Link this question to any mention the patient has made to side effects or drug burden.
- It is possible to explore the possibility of stopping or reducing medications without promising to deprescribe.
- This discussion will form an important part of the recommendations/report back to the GP.

Patients might not understand this question or assume their GP knows everything about their preferences. This question is to ensure that the patient's goals and health priorities are represented in the report to the GP and the patient summary. This can improve communication between patient, pharmacist and GP. Strategies to use with this question:

• **Reword question so it's easier to understand:**

"Do you think that your GP understands what's most important to you with your health/medications?"

"Does your GP know how you feel/that you don't want any changes to be made to your medicines?"

Contact Information

If you have any questions or queries about the Medicines Conversation Guide, please contact one of our researchers at the University of Sydney:

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