

Steps to Safer Prescribing



STEP 1

CORRECT PATIENT

Before prescribing, whether it be a face to face or remote consultation, ensure that you:

- have the correct patient details: name, address and date of birth
- have access to the correct patient record, if available
- have up-to-date medical information, e.g. allergies, co-morbidity
- are aware of higher risk situations, where you may not have access to the patient record e.g. house calls, out-of-hours consultations, remote consultations, emergency situations.

In relation to transcribing, the Medical Council's Guide to Professional Conduct & Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners, 9th Edition, 2024 states:

36.1 Transcribing incurs the same responsibilities as prescribing. The general principles outlined in relation to continuity of care should be followed.

36.2 If you have any issues or concerns about transcribing an original prescription you should liaise with and seek clarification from the original prescribing doctor or member of their team before issuing a prescription.



STEP 2

CHOICE OF MEDICATION

Before prescribing consider whether:

- it is in the patient's best interest
- the medication is evidence-based and consistent with current guidelines
- it is necessary
- the benefits outweigh the risks
- any special considerations and/or contraindications apply, e.g.:
 - pregnancy, lactation or trying to conceive
 - allergies, intolerances or adverse drug reactions
 - renal & hepatic impairment
 - over-the-counter products or herbal medications
 - dietary factors such as cranberry juice/warfarin, grapefruit/statins
 - alcohol and recreational drug use
 - other patient factors:
 - co-morbidities, polypharmacy, vulnerabilities.



STEP 3

KNOWLEDGE

- always check details of unfamiliar drugs and check doses
- make use of guidelines e.g. **Ireland Medicines Formulary**, **British National Formulary**
- take special care with paediatric doses, taking age and weight into account
- check the SPC¹ where necessary, particularly when prescribing high risk medication.



STEP 4

EXPLAIN TO THE PATIENT:

- risks and benefits of the medications
- known side effects
- how to take the medication oral/topical/intranasal etc.
- duration of the treatment



STEP 5

SHARED DECISION-MAKING

Allow the patient to ask questions.

- Explore any specific patient concerns.
- Consider using decision aids, charts etc. to enable you and the patient to reach an agreement and understanding.
- Consider directing patient to read the PIL² which accompanies the medication.
- Consider using the 'teach-back' method (see below) to evaluate patient comprehension and the effectiveness of discussions.



STEP 6

REVIEW

Double-check the prescription to ensure the correct medication and dose have been selected from the dropdown menu.

This is particularly important when using e-prescribing, before sending it to the pharmacist.

Before issuing the prescription:

- check patient understanding of the treatment and encourage adherence
- confirm any monitoring and follow up arrangements
- remember to safety net, e.g. 'contact me if any problems'.



STEP 7

RECORD

Complete the medical record documenting the discussion, including where appropriate:

- risks
- benefits
- monitoring
- follow-up arrangements.

KEY RISK REDUCTION TIPS:

- When prescribing a high-risk medication which calls for regular monitoring, e.g. lithium, methotrexate, etc.:
 - remind the patient of the importance of monitoring and insert a comment on the prescription accordingly
 - add an alert on the patient's records to remind the prescribing doctor that further prescriptions should not be issued without the relevant monitoring. Where the patient's care is shared with secondary care, ensure clear communication regarding who is carrying out monitoring.
- Remember to 'Safety Net' and define the 'Next Steps' for the patient, e.g. 'call me if any problems', 'come back next week' etc.
- Always review the prescription before signing.
- Where e-prescribing is utilised, take a second look before clicking the 'send' prescription to the pharmacy.
- For complex prescriptions consider using the 'teach-back' method to check patient understanding e.g. 'Can you repeat back to me your understanding of this medication and how to take it'.

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