

Oral Systemic Therapy Patient Education: a Guide for Health Professionals ¹

This resource was designed to support health professionals conducting teaching with patients whom will self-administer their oral systemic therapy for cancer at home.

Health professionals administering oral systemic therapy for hospital in-patients, Long Term Care facility residents or Home Care patients should focus on the sections marked *.

All systemic therapy teaching should be documented on the Systemic Therapy Patient Teaching Checklist.

Patient education should not commence until issues related to drug access have been resolved (ie insurance).

Key Assessment Questions:

1. What have you been told about your treatment plan? *

Ensure the patient knows that the oral agent is to treat their cancer and are taken by mouth for their cancer.

2. What other medications or pills do you take?

(*Inpatients, LTC or HC - perform medication reconciliation)

If you have a list of medicines, review the list with the patient. Probe re: non-prescription), herbs, complementary, or other treatments.

If you do not have a list, check with their Pharmacist or ask the patient what medicines he/she is taking, (both prescription and non-prescription), herbs, complementary, or other treatments.

3. Are you able to swallow pills or tablets?

If no, have them explain why and consult with pharmacist re: administration options.

¹ Adapted from the MASCC Teaching Tool for Patients Receiving Oral Agents for Cancer (2009). Denmark, Sweden: Multinational Association for Supportive Care in Cancer

4. Is it difficult for you to see/read the drug label or instructions?
If yes, is a family member or caregiver supporting them through their treatment?
5. How easily can you open your other medicine bottles or packages?
If this is a challenge explore packaging options, family/caregiver support.
6. What other treatments have you had for your cancer?
Probe if there were any problems, for example, taking the medications or any adverse drug effects.
7. Do you have any symptoms that would affect your ability to keep down the pills, for example nausea or vomiting? *
Ensure appropriate antiemetics are ordered.
8. Which pharmacy will you be using to fill your prescription?
Delays in obtaining the treatment may affect start date

Generic Education for All Oral Systemic Therapy

Review the [Oral Systemic Therapy: a Guide for Patients](#) booklet with the patient.*

Ensure each of the following topic areas are covered:

- Description of systemic therapy *
- Description of oral systemic therapy *
- Filling the Prescription
- Importance of Adherence
- Safe Handling *
- Safe Storage

Drug-Specific Education

Review the [Medication Information Sheet](#) with the patient. *

Ensure each of the following topic areas are covered:

- Drug name (generic and trade) *
- What the drug/s looks like

- Dose and schedule, complete and review calendar
- Managing Missed Doses
- Potential side effects and management of them *
- Potential emergency situations and management of them *
- Lab evaluations or any medical tests required and schedule *
- Cytotoxic Precautions (review the [Cytotoxic Precautions at Home: a Guide for Patients and Families](#) booklet with the patient) *
- Drug and food interactions
- When and whom to call with questions *

Evaluation of Patient Understanding using “Teach Back”² *

Research indicates that patients immediately forget 40-80% of the health information they have received and nearly half of the information retained is incorrect.^{3,4}

Given the various side effects associated with systemic therapy, the risk of associated oncologic emergencies and the challenges patients have adhering to their oral systemic therapy and/or other medications, it is essential to ensure that patients have understood and can act upon the information shared during patient education sessions.

The “Teach Back” method allows you to confirm that you have explained to the patient what they need to know in a manner that the patient understands. Basically, the patient explains to you what you have just shared with them. “Teach Back” uses open ended questions that cannot be answered with a “yes” or “no” response.

The following questions may be helpful when conducting systemic therapy patient teaching. You don’t need to ask all these questions, choose the ones that are most pertinent for the patient. It is best to intersperse the questions throughout the teaching session rather than leaving all the questions until the end.

1. How and when will you take your cancer treatment?

Check response against medication information sheet, reinforce correct administration and dose, refer patient to the calendar

² Schillinger D, Piette J, Grumbach K, et al. Closing the loop: physician communication with diabetic patients who have low health literacy. *Arch Intern Med.* 2003;163(1):83-90.

³ Kessels RP. Patients' memory for medical information. *J R Soc Med.* May 2003;96(5):219-22.

⁴ Anderson JL, Dodman S, Kopelman M, Fleming A. Patient information recall in a rheumatology clinic. *Rheumatology.* 1979;18(1):18-22.

- 2. A lot of people have trouble taking their treatment the way they are asked to, what do you think might get in the way of you taking your treatment?**

Explore strategies to overcome barriers: forget when to take it; do not want to take it; not confident it will work; financial issues; can't swallow it; vomiting up doses; can't open packaging; ran out of medication; had side effects and stopped taking it; felt better and stopped taking it; or caregiver hasn't been available to help with drugs

- 3. If you miss taking your treatment, what will you do?**

Check response against medication information sheet, reinforce: what to do if a dose is missed, noting missed dose on calendar and the link between adherence and outcomes

- 4. If the patient is on a regime that includes a break between cycles, ask:**

- **When are you scheduled to stop taking your treatment?**
- **When are you to start your next cycle?**
- **What tests do you need to have before you start your next cycle?**

Reinforce correct schedule and required tests

- 5. What are some of the signs or symptoms of side effects that you should watch for? ***

Reinforce the most serious side effects. Probe on what to do/who to call for most serious side effects

- 6. Can you tell me how you will keep your family and caregivers safe while you are receiving your treatment?**

Probe understanding of safe storage, cytotoxic waste, and precautions necessary according to protocol or drug received. Check response against protocol for precautions.

- 7. If there are certain foods the patient should avoid, ask - What foods were you advised not to eat while you are taking your cancer treatment?**

Reinforce foods to avoid (refer to medication information sheet)

- 8. Can you tell me who should know that you are taking oral treatment for your cancer?**

Reinforce the importance of informing family, caregivers, other doctors and dentists

- 9. What are your main concerns about receiving systemic therapy? ***