

Communication Skills in Pharmacy

A Practical Guide for Pharmacists

Effective communication

Effective communication is a critical competency for pharmacists, directly affecting patient safety, therapeutic outcomes, and professional collaboration. Miscommunication can lead to poor health outcomes or complaints, even without clinical error.

The [Ahpra Shared code of conduct](#) describes the professional behaviour and conduct National Boards expect from registered health practitioners.

Section 3.2 Effective Communication outlines that good practice includes that you:

- Communicate with courtesy, respect, compassion, and honesty.
- Tailor information to each person's age, maturity, needs, and health literacy.
- Address language, cultural, and communication needs, using translation if needed.
- Ensure patients understand the information provided.
- Support informed choices and respect patients' participation.
- Share relevant information clearly with colleagues while maintaining privacy.
- Stay non-judgemental and professional; avoid bullying, harassment, or unsafe conduct.

This resource provides practical guidance to help pharmacists strengthen communication skills in all professional interactions.

Communication skills

➤ Verbal communication should be attentive, clear and tailored to the patient

Pharmacists should give their full attention to the person they are speaking with, avoid interruption, and be empathetic, to the person's concerns.

It is essential to:

- Be clear and concise using a professional tone
- Use language appropriate for the audience
- Provide written material and/or demonstration to support any information already given.
- Confirm the person's understanding of the information provided.

➤ Active listening should involve attention and empathy with focus on the patient's concerns

Active listening is vital for effective professional communication, helping prevent misunderstandings and miscommunication.

Pharmacists are encouraged to:

- Allow the person to express their concerns or query without interruption or judgement.
- Use body language to demonstrate empathy and understanding.
- Clarify that you have understood the patient using paraphrasing or by summarising key points.

➤ Written communication should be professional, clear, and objective

Written communication encompasses reporting, documentation, email, communication by apps and many others.

Written communication should always be:

- Professional and clear
- Objective in tone and devoid of informal expressions and slang.

➤ Culturally safe pharmacy communication means respecting patients' cultural backgrounds.

Culturally safe communication requires pharmacists to listen, avoid assumptions, and tailor their approach to meet individual needs. Practising cultural safety builds trust and helps patients feel valued.

Pharmacists should:

- Respect diverse beliefs and experiences.
- Use clear, inclusive language without jargon.
- Identify and address cultural barriers.
- Encourage feedback and confirm understanding.
- Show empathy and sensitivity in all communication.

➤ Confidentiality and privacy should be considered for all forms of communication

Pharmacists must maintain patient privacy in all forms of communication, including verbal, written, and electronic. To ensure that a patient's health information is kept confidential pharmacists should:

- Obtain and record informed consent before sharing patient information.
- Conduct consultations in private settings.
- Access patient records only when authorised and professionally involved.
- Maintain confidentiality; avoid discussing patients outside professional contexts.
- Comply with privacy legislation for all record formats.

Communication Skills in Pharmacy

A Practical Guide for Pharmacists

Application to practice

➤ **Counselling should encompass clear, comprehensive, and professional communication to ensure medications are used safely and appropriately.**

Counselling is often a patient's final healthcare interaction before using medication or following health advice. Pharmacists must ensure patients have the information and ability to use medication safely.

- Introduce yourself and your role.
- Confirm the medicine's intended use and provide clear directions for administration.
- Demonstrate use of devices or dosing aids, ensuring patient understanding.
- Identify if further instructions are needed for safe use.
- Discuss expected outcomes, potential side effects, and management actions.
- Discuss storage, adherence, and lifestyle factors.
- Advise on missed or incorrect doses and possible interactions.
- Outline repeat prescription processes if needed.
- Encourage questions and provide support resources.
- Consider privacy when speaking with a third party.

➤ **Communication with other health professionals should be collaborative and patient-focused**

Pharmacists should work collaboratively with other health professionals to improve patient outcomes.

Pharmacists should:

- Protect patient privacy when sharing information.
- Use secure communication channels (e.g. encrypted email, secure messaging.)

- Involve and inform patients in decisions and outcomes.
- Document all communications and advice
- Resolve conflicts professionally, focusing on patient interests.

➤ **Communication during conflict, complaint or incident should remain professional and calm.**

Pharmacists may sometimes need to address challenging issues, such as declining supply for clinical reasons or disclosing dispensing errors. It is important to:

- Clearly outline the issue or concern.
- Listen to and acknowledge the patient's concerns showing empathy.
- Discuss possible alternatives and options including referral to another health service or practitioner.
- Document the interaction and advice provided and share relevant information with the prescriber as needed.
- Where an error has occurred, prioritise the patient's welfare and apologise.

➤ **Mandatory Reporting – Child Abuse and Neglect**

In NSW, mandatory reporting obligations apply to pharmacists who deliver services to children as part of their professional work, such as Vaccination and expanded Scope of Practice.

Under [section 27](#) of the Care Act, it is mandatory to make a report if the child is 0 to 15 years and at risk of significant harm. While it is not mandatory to make a report if it is a young person aged 16 to 17, reports can be still made under the Act.

There are two ways mandatory reporters can make a child protection report:

1. By eReport through the [ChildStory Reporter website](#).
2. By calling the Child Protection Helpline on **13 21 11**.

For more information, please refer to the [District of Communities and Justice webpage](#) and the NSW [Mandatory Reporter Guide](#).

Pharmacists in NSW are required to hold a Working With Children Check (WWCC) if their role involves provision of health services to a person under 18 who is unaccompanied by another adult. Further information is available from the [Office of the Children's Guardian](#) and the [Child Protection \(Working with Children\) Act 2012](#)

Resources

- [Pharmacy Board of Australia Codes and Guidelines](#)
- [Privacy Act 1988](#)
 - [The Australian Privacy Principles](#)
- [Quality and Safety Pharmacy Program \(QSPP\)](#)
- Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA)
 - [Code of Ethics](#)
 - [Professional Practice Standards](#)
 - [Dispensing Practice Guidelines](#)
 - [Guidelines for pharmacists supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with medicines management](#)
- Pharmaceutical Defence Limited (PDL)
 - [PDL Risk Management Guide for Pharmacists](#)
 - [Professional boundaries in pharmacy](#)
 - [CLASHED Action Plan](#)
 - [PDL Guide to Incident Management](#)
 - [PDL Podcast- The art of saying sorry](#)
 - [Saying Sorry- A guide for NSW Pharmacists](#)
- [Translating and Interpreting Service \(TIS National\)](#)