

Brown Bag Medication Review

Overview

The “Brown Bag Review” of medications is a common practice that encourages patients to bring all of their medications and supplements to medical appointments. This provides clinical staff with an opportunity to review and discuss the medications that the patient is taking. Reviewing medications with your patient may help you to:

- Answer the patient’s questions.
- Verify what the patient is taking.
- Identify and/or avoid medication errors and drug interactions.
- Assist the patient to take medications correctly.

Purpose

To help practices develop a process to improve communication about medications between patients and clinical staff.

Testimonials




We tested the tools in this toolkit with 9 different practices. Practices that tested this tool were shocked at what they found.

- “On the day we did the brown bag review, we had a patient experiencing unexplained symptoms. It wasn’t until we looked at his medicine bottles that we realized he was taking a double dose of beta blocker. This explained his symptoms perfectly. Had we not had the medicine bottles to identify the problem, we would have sent him to the hospital.”
- “Out of 10-15 brown bag reviews, only 2 were accurate.”
- “Out of five brown bag reviews, we found three that had duplicate medicine bottles resulting in double dosing and one discontinued medicine that was still being taken.”
- “We found errors in every review, including one where a patient stopped his medicine on his own, another where a patient was taking a supplement the provider did not know about, and others where the medicines did not match what was in the chart.”

Action

1. Get patients to bring in their medicines. Conducting brown bag reviews has been VERY eye-opening for many practices, and most feel it is a worthwhile thing to do. The challenge is getting the patient to bring in their medications. It helps to have a full-scale campaign whereby everyone in the practice is stressing its importance and many different tactics are employed. Here are a few suggestions:

- **What to bring:** Review with patients what to bring.
 - ◇ All prescription medicines (including pills and creams).
 - ◇ All over-the-counter medicine they take regularly.
 - ◇ All vitamins and supplements.
 - ◇ All herbal medicines.
- **Ways to remind:**
 - ◇ **On the appointment card.**
 - ◇ **During the appointment reminder call.**
 - ◇ **During the visit:** discuss as a part of their visit.
 - ◇ **Hang posters**  in the exam rooms and the waiting room.
 - ◇ **Bulletin board:** Display a bulletin board with anonymous case studies and persuasive reasons for bringing in their medicines.
 - ◇ **Emphasize medication reduction:** A brown bag review may result in the physician stopping some medications, which is often appealing to patients.
 - ◇ **Provide a carrier:** Consider providing your patients with a small sack (canvas, paper, or plastic) to carry their medications. The sack may have a printed reminder on one side and your practice name on the other.

2. Set out the medications.

- The nurse should place all of the patient's medications on the counter in the exam room to remind the clinician to perform a medication review.

3. Offer praise to the patient for bringing medications.

- Thank the patient for bringing his or her medications and stress the importance of bringing them to every visit.

4. Review the medications.

- **Introduce the review process:** Ask the patient if they have any questions about their medications, and acknowledge the purpose of reviewing medications.
- **Some helpful questions to ask:**
 - ◇ “Are you taking any new medications since your last visit?”
 - ◇ “Have you stopped taking any medications since your last visit?”
 - ◇ “Please show me what you take for your <disease name> ?”
 - ◇ “How many of these pills do you take each day?”
 - ◇ “When do you take this pill?”
 - ◇ “What do you take this medication for?”

5. Clarify medication instructions.

- Clearly review with the patient what medications they should be taking and how to take them. Refer to [Tool 5: The Teach-Back Method](#) ↗ to confirm understanding.

6. Update the medications in the patient’s chart.

- Clearly document medication inconsistencies and what the patient is directed to take.
- Note in the chart when full medication reviews are done and when partial or updated ones are done to help track the process for the practice.

7. Provide patient with updated list of medications.

- Refer to [Tool 16: Improve Medication Adherence and Accuracy](#) ↗ for ways to document medications for patients and assist them with remembering and correctly taking them.

8. Bill for medication review.

- Select the ICD-9 V58.69 to bill the patient’s insurance for the review.

Track Your Progress

- Document in the patient medical record whether or not a medication review occurred at the visit. At the end of a day or week, identify the percentage of patients who had a medication review completed.
- During a week, count the number of medication reviews that identified a problem.

- Strive to have 90 percent of patients with a review in the past 12 months.

Resources

- The American Medical Association manual “[Health Literacy and Patient Safety: Help Patients Understand](#)” offers information on medication reviews.
- [Brown Bag Toolkit](#) is a toolkit from the Ohio Patient Safety Institute that contains information for practices with pharmacies to plan a brown bag event.