

# ASK ABOUT MEDICINES

Almost everyone takes medicines at some point in their lives and they have an enormous potential to affect our health and wellbeing. A new, uniquely broad-based initiative called Ask About Medicines, aims to increase people's understanding of their medicines – by creating more opportunities to discuss their views and concerns about medicines with a range of health professionals, including pharmacists, doctors and nurses.

To find out how people regard medicines and information about medicines, a survey of more than 2,000 adults in the UK was conducted by MORI especially for Ask About Medicines Week held last October. A separate MORI poll was conducted among health professionals including GPs, pharmacists and practice nurses.

Findings from the surveys include:

- 55% of people prescribed a new medicine in the last twelve months felt that they did not know enough about other possible medicines or treatments
- Almost one in three medicine takers felt they did not know enough about the potential side effects of medicines
- Six out of ten patients said that the benefits of medicines outweighed the risks
- Four out of five people (81%) said that it was valuable to have different types of information about medicines from different sources (eg patient leaflets and Internet sites)
- One in five people want to make more use of the Internet in future as a source of medicines information
- The most popular source of information remains advice from health professionals
- Health professionals are ready for partnership. Over half of the GPs, practice nurses and pharmacists surveyed believe that most patients

want to be treated as partners in decisions about medicine taking. Only one in ten doctors said that patients would want the prescriber to decide for them

“Research shows that up to 50% of people do not take their medicines as prescribed<sup>1</sup> and that people's experiences, beliefs and views about medicines influence if, when and how they take their medicines more strongly than any other factor<sup>2</sup>,” says Joanne Shaw, Director of the Task Force on Medicines Partnership and co-chair of the AAMW Executive. “The survey shows us that one in three people believe the benefits of taking medicines don't outweigh the risks”

Knowing what questions to ask is key to prompting discussion, and to help facilitate this process an Ask About Medicines Question Card has been specially developed with the National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA). The card features five key questions and five top tips for asking questions about medicines. The cards have been made available in pharmacies and a range of other healthcare settings across England, Wales and Scotland.

Wendy Harris, Senior Pharmacist at the NPSA says: “The NPSA is delighted to be sponsoring the

**Ask About Your Medicines**

**Do you know:**

- what medicines you are taking and why?
- how and when to take them?
- whether or not any of your medicines react with each other, or with food or alcohol?

If you've answered 'no' to any of these questions it may be time to **ask about your medicines**.

This leaflet is to help you know what to ask whenever you are prescribed or buy medicines.

Health professionals can help you understand more about your medicines. They will listen to your views and concerns about your medicines – and answer your questions. They need to hear from you to make sure the treatment they offer is the best **for you**.

\* Health professionals include doctors, pharmacists, nurses and dentists.

Below are some questions that you could ask a health professional to help you understand your medicines better. You may have others you'd also like to ask.

**Ask About Your Medicines**

- What does this medicine do?
- How long will I need to use it?
- How and when should I take it?
- Should I avoid any other medicines, drinks, foods or activities when I am taking this medicine?
- What are the possible risks and side effects – and what should I do if they happen to me?

**ask** www.askaboutmedicines.org **NPSA** National Patient Safety Agency

AAMW Question Card in a shared effort to encourage patients and health professionals to discuss medication use. Involving patients and their carers in decisions about their medicines and informing them to take or use their medicines safely will, we believe, help ensure that they obtain the greatest benefit from their medicines in the safest possible way.”

There is an enormous amount of information about health available from a large number of different sources, but it is not always easy to know how and where to start looking for it. The Health and Medicines Information Guide and Directory provides guidance on how to find health information and how to judge if it meets people's own particular needs. The booklet includes a Directory listing information resources, helpline numbers and Internet-based links that will help people get started. The booklet will be available to download from [www.askaboutmedicines.org](http://www.askaboutmedicines.org). Printed copies can be ordered from [www.abpi.org.uk](http://www.abpi.org.uk).

“Research shows that most medicine takers see their health professional as the best person to advise on medicine taking, but often during consultations they do not ask the questions that most concern them,” says Kristin McCarthy, Director of the Doctor Patient Partnership and member of the AAMW Executive Group. “Encouraging more open discussion about medicines helps people to be actively involved in decisions about their treatment and ultimately leads to safer and more effective medicine taking.”

## REFERENCES:

1. **'From Compliance to Concordance'**, Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, 1997
2. Horne R & Weinman J (1999) Patients' beliefs about prescribed medicines & their role in adherence to treatment in chronic illness. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 47(6): 555-567