

Talking to patients about naloxone

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This factsheet aims to support pharmacists and pharmacy staff to start a conversation with patients about naloxone. It can be a sensitive topic as patients who take prescription opioids may believe that drug overdose only happens to people using illicit opioid drugs. Patients may respond better to terms like 'opioid poisoning' or 'opioid induced slowed breathing'.

It's important that you and your staff feel comfortable talking about naloxone.

Patient picking up medicine like oxycodone or fentanyl

New prescription

Pharmacist / Pharmacy Assistant:

This is a new prescription for an opioid drug. So, we should talk about things that might go wrong. Have you heard of naloxone?

Repeat prescription

Pharmacist / Pharmacy Assistant:

You have been taking this prescription for a while now. You mightn't have any questions about it, but have you heard of naloxone?

Patient: *No, I've never heard of it.*

Pharmacist / pharmacy assistant:

Naloxone is a medication that can be used if you have serious side effects to your medication.

It's like an EpiPen® for allergic reactions.

If you are interested, I can give you some information to look at while your prescription is being filled. Then we can go through it and answer any questions you might have.

If you're interested, you can get it over the counter here without a prescription, but it is cheaper on a prescription—we can talk to your doctor about this for you.

Other approaches

Can we talk for a moment about the medication that you are taking to help manage your pain?

Has anyone talked to you about which medication or other things you should avoid while you're taking this medication?

Can I talk to you about how to stay safe and keep your family safe while you are taking opioid pain medication?

Would it be okay if I talk to you about some information available for your medication includes methadone / suboxone)?

Can we talk for just a moment about how to prevent opioid poisoning from a pain medication [or heroin / methadone]?



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Things to cover:

- Risks of overdose – other medication, illicit drugs or alcohol, resuming medication after a break
- How naloxone works
- Signs of opioid overdose
- Response – how to use naloxone and the importance of calling for help – 000.

Do:

- speak to the patient in a quiet area
- be understanding
- offer naloxone to patients using opioid medications or getting injecting equipment
- provide information on overdose and naloxone
- if they already have naloxone remind them to check the expiry date.

Don't:

- be afraid to start the conversation
- be judgemental
- discourage the patient
- be discouraged if they are not interested
- use the words drug overdose – consider other words like 'opioid induced slowed breathing' or 'opioid poisoning'.

Adapted from '*Starting the Conversation About Naloxone*', Missouri Opioid State Targeted Response.