Ask, Assess, Advise explained





Be wise and **advise**

In the past two editions of frontline, we have focussed on the first two steps of Ask, Assess, Advise. This edition focuses on the 'advise' bubble, and how you can help your customers use their medicines safely and effectively.

Helping customers with their health problems is your top priority in the pharmacy. In addition to helping customers with their health, knowledge and advice adds value to a product sale and builds trust with your customers.

The 'ask' and 'assess' bubbles are all about helping the customer select the right product. Once a product is selected, the 'advise' bubble is all about helping customers understand how to get the best results from the selected product. This means helping customers understand how to use products safely and effectively.

To make sure you provide the best advice every time, you should follow the points in the advise box in order. This helps you make sure you don't miss anything important. When you advise, it is best if you are familiar with the product. However, if you are new to pharmacy, you may use information on the product packaging to help you advise your customer. Whether you are new to pharmacy, or have worked in pharmacy for some time, if you or your customers are ever unsure about anything, you should refer them to the pharmacist.

Advising your customers about things they are familiar with can be frustrating for them. It is important to gauge body language and not unnecessarily repeat information if it is clear the customer is familiar with the information. However, some key points, such as risk of sedation, are important enough to be mentioned in all cases.

The boxes on the opposite page talk more about how to advise your customers. On the following two pages (6 and 7) you will find two examples of how to apply Ask, Assess, Advise to product requests for pain relief related medicines.

1. Who is the product for?

(Is the person less than two years old, more than 65 years old, pregnant or breastfeeding?)

- 2. What are the symptoms?
- 3. How long have the symptoms lasted?
- 4. Have you tried other medicines or treatments?
- 5. Do you have any other health conditions?
- 6. Do you take any other medicines?

- Has the customer answered 'yes' to any of the above questions?
- Are you unsure if the product is right for the person's symptoms? Consider how severe the symptoms are and how long they have lasted.
- Is the customer asking for a large quantity of medicine? Consider overuse.
- Does the customer appear to be sick, confused, uncertain, dissatisfied, angry, or under the influence of drugs or alcohol?
- Is the customer requesting a Pharmacist Only Medicine (S3)?
- Are you concerned about the accuracy of the information the customer is giving you?

You or customer

uncertain

Advise the customer about the product, including:

- how to use it correctly;
- · what to do if the symptoms don't improve;
- what other options may help, including other products and/or lifestyle advice.

Also include other points specific to the selected product.

advise

You or customer uncertain

Refer the customer to the pharmacist if they:

- Ask a question that you can't answer or are unsure about;
- Provide new information which may affect product choice;
- · Seem unsure about anything.

How to use it correctly

This includes the dose and frequency of use. It also includes more specific directions for use, such as if a tablet should be swallowed whole, or the step by step process of using a product on the skin. For example, a scabies lotion needs to be applied to the whole body (except the face) using a brush.

What to do if the symptoms don't improve

This includes how quickly the symptoms should resolve, and whether they should seek medical attention or come back to the pharmacy if symptoms don't resolve.

Common side effects

All medicines can have side effects. It is important customers know what side effects are normal, and what side effects are dangerous. It is particularly important customers are aware if a medicine they are using may cause sedation.

What other options may help, including other products and/or lifestyle advice

Sometimes other products may be recommended to help manage side effects. For example fibre supplements with pain medicines containing codeine.

Useful resources include:

- Self Care cards
- Better Health Channel fact sheets (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)
- Brochures available in the pharmacy
- Product support material (for example booklets or internet resources)

Also include other points specific to the product

This includes:

- Storage conditions
- Disposal

For example, bottles containing eye drops should be discarded after 28 days.

* A Symptom Based Request is where a customer asks for a product which will assist with symptoms they describe without requesting a particular product.

common side effects; and