



# Safe prescribing

MPS



Putting members **first**

Advice correct as of November 2013

This factsheet gives advice about avoiding prescribing errors, which account for a large number of clinical negligence claims against doctors in both primary and secondary care.

## Before prescribing

You should only prescribe drugs to meet the identified need of the patient and in their best interest. You should avoid treating yourself or anyone close to you.

Ensure you are familiar with current guidance from the Hospital Authority Drug Formulary, including the use, side effects and contraindications of the medicines you are intending to prescribe.

It is important to be aware that the person who signs the prescription is the one who will be held accountable, should something go wrong. If you prescribe at the recommendation of a nurse or other healthcare professional who does not have prescribing rights, you must be personally satisfied that the prescription is appropriate for the patient concerned. You are also advised to follow the provisions of the *Good Dispensing Practice Manual*, issued by the Hong Kong Medical Association.

## Dangerous drugs

You should be familiar with the *Guidelines on Proper Prescription and Dispensing of Dangerous Drugs*, found at Appendix E of the Medical Council of Hong Kong's *Code of Professional Conduct*. Drugs of addiction or dependence should not be prescribed or supplied other than in the course of bona fide and proper treatment.

You should not permit unqualified assistants to take charge of any location in which scheduled poisons and dangerous drugs, or preparations containing such substances, are supplied to the public.

You are also required to keep a register of every quantity of dangerous drug that you obtain or supply, in accordance with regulations 5 and 6 of the Dangerous Drugs Regulations (Cap 134A).

## Checking the dosage

You should check that you are prescribing the correct dose of the medicine; this includes checking the strength, frequency and route. This is especially important in prescribing for children.

## Checking for contraindications

You need to ensure that the patient:

- is not allergic to the proposed medication
- is not taking any medication (prescription, over-the-counter or alternative medicine) that may interact with the proposed medication
- does not have an illness that may be exacerbated by the medication.

## Consent

The principle of informed consent applies as much to the prescribing of medication as it does to the performance of a surgical procedure. Patients should be fully informed about their condition, the reason for recommending the proposed treatment, what they can expect in terms of improvement, symptoms to report, the need for any monitoring and review, and side effects that may occur – including interactions with other drugs, such as over-the-counter medicines and alcohol.

It may be appropriate to warn the patient of potential adverse effects, eg, that driving and/or handling dangerous machinery would be contraindicated. All warnings and explanations given should be documented in the patient records.

## Monitoring and follow-up arrangements

You should agree with the patient the appropriate arrangements for follow-up and monitoring. Patients need to know under what circumstances they need to come back, and what the consequences of failing to attend for review could be. This should be clearly recorded in the patient notes.

## Writing prescriptions

Computer-generated prescriptions are now common; however, if you are writing a prescription, there are some key points you should remember:

- use indelible ink
- do not abbreviate drug names
- avoid abbreviations such as mg and µg
- do not use decimal places if it is not necessary
- clearly state the drug, dose, strength, route and frequency
- if amending the prescription, draw a line through the incorrect part and initial the change.

Prescriptions should be dated, and should include the full name and address of the patient. For patients under 12 years old, you are required to include the patient's age or date of birth. Blank prescription forms should be kept in secure conditions. A clear record should be made in the patient's notes of all medicines prescribed.

## Further information

- Hong Kong Medical Association, *Good Dispensing Practice Manual* – [www.hkma.org](http://www.hkma.org)
- Hospital Authority Drug Formulary – [www.ha.org.hk](http://www.ha.org.hk)
- Medical Council of Hong Kong, *Code of Professional Conduct* – [www.mchk.org.hk](http://www.mchk.org.hk)
- Pharmacy and Poisons Board of Hong Kong – [www.ppbhk.org.hk](http://www.ppbhk.org.hk)
- Department of Health, *Compendium of Pharmaceutical Products* – [www.dh.gov.hk](http://www.dh.gov.hk)
- Dangerous Drugs Regulations (Cap 134A) – [www.legislation.gov.hk](http://www.legislation.gov.hk)

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