

From: The DOH Insider (DOH's Intranet)

Greeting Cards from Your Pharmacist?

Just Ask Program Aims to Improve Patient Care

Imagine, you're a patient in the hospital and you get a greeting card from the hospital pharmacist! How weird is that? Not weird at all, but part of a program aimed at getting patients to more actively seek out the knowledge and skills of pharmacists to help them better understand the medications they've been prescribed and ultimately improve their health care.



Pharmacist Greeting Card

Each year in U.S. hospitals about 770,000 patients are injured or die from adverse drug events (ADEs). The estimated cost of such ADEs ranges from \$1.5 to \$5.6 billion annually. Studies have reported that adverse drug events increase the average length of stay of a hospital patient by three to four days, add about \$4,600 to health care costs, and triple the mortality rates.

That's why the department has partnered with the American Society of Health System Pharmacists (ASHP), New York State Council of Health-system Pharmacists, and the New York Patient Safety Enhancement Committee (NY PASE) Health Literacy Subcommittee to implement the **Just Ask!** campaign. Among the materials being provided to participating hospitals are pharmacist greeting cards.

This new program highlights the hospital pharmacist role as a medication expert and is designed to increase the visibility of pharmacists and pharmacy departments among hospital patients, visitors, and staff.



Just Ask button for hospital staff

The Just Ask campaign kicked off in November encouraging patients to “**Just Ask!**” hospital pharmacists questions about their medications. The initial campaign involves 39 randomly selected New York State hospitals.

Empowering Patients, Improving Care

It is estimated if a hospital with an average of 20,000 admissions annually were to implement a program such as the Just Ask campaign it could potentially save about \$3.3 million annually in direct cost savings, decrease lengths of stays, improve patient safety, and reduce the ADE related mortality rates by up to three fold.

The goal of the Just Ask Campaign is to empower hospital patients to Just Ask their hospital pharmacists about their medications. The project objectives are to build upon recommendations from the Institute of Medicine’s Prevention of Medication Errors Report:

- Improve communications among health care providers and patients.
- Ensure patients know their medications and how to safely use them.
- Empower patients to Just Ask questions about their medications and keep a medication record.
- Improve health literacy.
- Enhance medication reconciliation.
- Prevent medication errors.
- Encourage hospital pharmacists to submit adverse drug event data to the voluntary Food and Drug Administration (FDA) MedWatch system.

A proposed tiered Just Ask test pilot protocol was developed with input from ASHP, NYS Council of Health-system Pharmacists, hospital pharmacies, and

New York State Colleges of Pharmacies. Each hospital that agreed to participate was asked to conduct and evaluate the following process:

- Medication reconciliation done by the hospital pharmacist and/or a sixth year PharmD student
- Check list of top drugs responsible for adverse drug events
- Complete with patient a personal medication list
- Just Ask and medication counseling and
- Voluntary reporting of adverse drug events to the FDA Med Watch system: <http://www.fda.gov/medwatch/>

Medication Reconciliation is a battery of efforts to reduce medication errors by attempting to maintain a continuous medication record for every patient, even when they transfer between care settings and from the care of one clinician to another. Most of these efforts are designed to help patients understand and maintain their own "personal medication histories".

Materials Sent to Participating Hospitals

The Just Ask packet contained a cover letter, toolkit and pre and post hospital and patient evaluation surveys.

The campaign offers posters, table-tent cards, buttons, patient greeting cards, medication tip sheets and other materials aiming to educate consumers about medication safety and boost the visibility of pharmacists as drug experts on the patient-care team.

At the centerpiece of the campaign is a toolkit featuring an assortment of materials that can be incorporated into a variety of hospital and health-system settings. The materials urge patients to take a more active role in their healthcare by talking to the pharmacist when they have questions about their medications. Several of the materials in the kit are also provided in Spanish.

The toolkit includes:

- Patient greeting cards, which pharmacists can personally deliver to patients or place them on their bedside tables;
- Table-tent cards, which can be set on hospital cafeteria tables, admissions desks, waiting areas and patient bedside tables;
- Posters that can be hung in hospital waiting and lobby areas and information displays;
- Patient education tip sheets, which pharmacists, nurses and physicians can hand to patients. The tip sheets also can be added to hospital Web sites, set at admissions desks or placed in hospital display racks;

- Brochures that can be distributed at health fairs and provided to patients at hospitals, which include a medication, list where patients can keep track of medications and dosages.
- The medical evidence based University of Wisconsin medication reconciliation protocol.
- The “My Medication List” so pharmacists can assist patients complete their personal medication history following medication reconciliation.
<http://www.safemedication.com/safemed/MyMedicineList.aspx>
- Checklist of top drugs responsible for senior emergency room visits (warfarin, insulin, digoxin) and hospital adverse drug events (warfarin, insulin, digoxin, morphine, potassium chloride, albuterol, heparin, vancomycin, cefazolin, APAP, and furosemide).
- A medical authoritative resource to assist the hospital pharmacists with medication counseling--
<http://www.safemedication.com/safemed/MyMedicineList.aspx>

[The department has posted copies of the co-branded ASHP Just Ask material on its Web site](#) to allow the test pilot hospital pharmacies 24/7 access to download and reproduce the resource material.

The pharmacy departments may tailor the posters, table tents and other materials to their hospitals by adding their hospital logos and photos of clinical staff.

Plans are to collect and analyze data from the initial 39-hospital test pilot. Tentative plans are to then offer the Just Ask Program to all other New York State hospitals in early 2009.

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