

# Drug Information for Patients

HEALTH AND PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE,\* AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

THE AMERICAN College of Physicians reaffirms its position, promulgated in 1979, that patients be provided essential information about prescribed drugs. Such information should include the reasons the drug has been ordered, the ways in which it should be taken, common side effects and how to deal with them, and a warning about serious problems that demand prompt cessation of the drug use and seeking of medical attention. Physicians are urged to impart such information orally as they write prescriptions.

Through oral communication physicians convey to their patients how important they believe it is to follow the regimen prescribed. However, complex instructions are not retained by patients, and oral information and exhortation should be supplemented by written information about their prescription drugs. Acceptable written materials currently are available that present essential information about drugs in language that most patients can understand. Some patients, either because of poor language comprehension or excessive fears, may not benefit from receiving written information about their prescriptions. Physicians must decide on an individual basis

\*Members of the Health and Public Policy Committee for the 1984-85 term include Edwin P. Maynard III, M.D., *Chairman*; John H. Eisenberg, M.D.; Richard G. Farmer, M.D.; Daniel D. Federman, M.D.; John R. Hogness, M.D.; Leo E. Hollister, M.D.; Charles E. Lewis, M.D.; Donald E. Olson, M.D.; Malcolm L. Peterson, M.D.; Theodore B. Schwartz, M.D.; and Helen L. Smits, M.D. This paper was authored by Suzanne Stone and was developed for the Health and Public Policy Committee by the Clinical Pharmacology Subcommittee: Leo E. Hollister, M.D., *Chairman*; Robert J. Barnet, M.D.; Victor Herbert, M.D., J.D.; David C. Lewis, M.D.; Albert I. Mendeloff, M.D.; Stuart L. Nightingale, M.D.; and Paul D. Stolley, M.D. This paper was adopted by the Executive Committee of the Board of Regents on 31 May 1985.

which patients might not benefit from written statements.

The American Medical Association provides, at nominal cost, information leaflets written in lay language for approximately 100 frequently prescribed drugs or drug classes. Virtually identical leaflets can be obtained through the American Academy of Family Physicians or the United States Pharmacopeial Convention, Inc. (USP). The USP also publishes *Advice for the Patient*, a book, revised yearly, from which physicians and pharmacists are permitted to reproduce pages for distribution to patients. Another source of such information is the *Medication Instruction Leaflets for Seniors*, from the pharmacy service of the American Association of Retired Persons. Physicians should become familiar with various sources of such materials and should develop methods for providing them to their patients. Such a service by physicians should enhance the physician-patient relationship.

The American College of Physicians supports the dissemination of presently available written drug information and believes that its distribution to patients will increase the benefit derived from prescribed drugs.

► Requests for reprints should be addressed to Elnora M. Rhodes; Department of Public Policy, American College of Physicians, 655 Fifteenth Street, N.W., Suite 425; Washington, DC 20005.

## Sources

1. American Medical Association, Order Department, 535 N. Dearborn Street, Chicago, IL 60610 (312-280-7168).
2. American Academy of Family Physicians, 600 Maryland Avenue SW, Suite 770, Washington, DC 20024 (202-488-7448).
3. United States Pharmacopeial Convention, Inc., 12601 Twinbrook Parkway, Rockville, MD 20852 (201-881-0666).
4. American Association of Retired Persons, Retired Persons Services Branch, 1 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 (703-684-0244).