

OP-ED RELEASE

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THE IMPORTANCE OF PATIENT SAFETY AWARENESS WEEK

As we recognize Patient Safety Awareness Week (March 2 – 8), we'd like to remind you that the first step to improved safety could be as close as your pharmacy. Your community pharmacist has extensive education and expertise regarding your prescription medications, and is often your most accessible health care provider, seeing patients on a regular basis without requiring appointments.

As a community pharmacist of over 25 years, I have talked to thousands of patients to help them better understand the benefits of prescribed drugs, reduce the risk of dangerous side effects, and make sure they take their medicines correctly. I am also the current president of the National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA), representing more than 23,000 community pharmacies that dispense nearly half of the nation's retail prescription medicines.

One way to improve patient safety and physician and pharmacy efficiency is replacing paper prescriptions with electronic ones. The electronic transmission of prescription information between physicians and pharmacists, e-prescribing, means no more lost prescriptions, no more illegible handwriting for pharmacists to interpret, and pharmacies can start working on your prescription as you leave the doctor's office.

This week, NCPA and the National Association of Chain Drug Stores celebrate the fourth annual Safe-Rx Awards in Washington, D.C. The Safe-Rx Awards recognize how e-prescribing enhances patient safety by providing a more secure, accurate, and informed prescribing process. The awards go to the top 10 e-prescribing states in the nation and three physicians within the winning states who have demonstrated outstanding leadership through their use of e-prescribing technology. The winning states this year are Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Nevada, Delaware, Michigan, Maryland, North Carolina, Arizona, Connecticut, and Washington.

Patients also can help improve their safety and health by providing the pharmacist with all of the information needed to serve you better. Be sure to tell them all of the medications you are taking, including over-the-counter products, vitamins, and herbal medicines, and whether you smoke, drink alcohol, or have allergies to foods or medications. I strongly recommend patronizing just one pharmacy so it can maintain a complete record.

A close relationship with pharmacists not only maximizes the value patients get from their medications through proper usage and ongoing monitoring, but also allows for cost-efficiency. A pharmacist can ensure you and your prescriber are aware of the least expensive alternatives, especially generic brands. With health care costs exploding, pharmacists can help alleviate the financial strain for patients, employers, and taxpayers with this type of advice.

Never give your medications to anyone else or take someone else's medications. Once you have taken your prescriptions home, remember to keep them out of the sight and reach of children. Avoid taking

them in front of children, since they tend to mimic adults. And remember to destroy unused and out-of-date medications.

Talk to your pharmacist today. Ask about your current medications and whether the pharmacy accepts electronic prescriptions. As a pharmacist myself, I do my best to counsel my patients, and I encourage all of my colleagues to insist upon the same standard. We would encourage you to talk to your pharmacist and ensure you are taking your medications safely and correctly.

Stephen L. Giroux, RPh
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The National Community Pharmacists Association, founded in 1898, represents the nation's community pharmacists, including the owners of more than 23,000 pharmacies. The nation's independent pharmacies, independent pharmacy franchises, and independent chains dispense nearly half of the nation's retail prescription medicines. To learn more go to www.ncpanet.org.