

MEDICATION SAFETY

Starting in Medication Safety? Some hints for early career pharmacists

Five pointers for effective medication safety communication



Linda Graudins^{1,2}, BPharm, DipHospPharm, GradDipClinEpid, AdvPracPharm, FSHP

1. Medication Safety Editor, Medication Safety Leadership Committee
2. Medication Safety Lead, Alfred Health, Melbourne, Australia

Clarity in writing is something that often requires years of practice, so start early! Here are some pointers to keep in mind when preparing your Medication Safety message.

Pointer #1: Re-read and re-read

Your first report/minutes/poster draft will NOT be perfect. Even the most experienced authors write multiple versions before submitting a manuscript to an editor. Go to town in your first draft. After a break re-read your draft carefully. You will be amazed how many changes will be needed. Be prepared to write several drafts.

Before submitting your final version ask your supervisor to proof read and give feedback.

Pointer #2: Edit for clarity

Editing is essential in ensuring you clearly communicate your aims. For example, are you presenting your Medication Safety audit to a multidisciplinary meeting? Is your aim clear and concise? Highlight your data in tables and order the data from the high to low numbers. The audience will initially look at result tables to get a feel for a presentation. Data may get lost in the text. Take time to consider if outlier results are correct and obtain details about why there are outliers.

Don't forget: the aim of an audit should be addressed in your conclusion.

Pointer #3: Formatting and presentation

Now that you've considered the content of your work, ensure you also consider how you are presenting this work. Give yourself time to check how your presentation or document looks before sending to your colleagues or supervisor, and again before finalising. Is your work formatted consistently and well-presented? Have you used terminology correctly and consistently throughout? Enlarging your document to 125% assists your spell- and font-checks.

You want your audience to be focused on your message. There is nothing more distracting than HAVing differnet fonts and rong spelling.

Pointer #4: Consider your audience

When composing a Medication Safety alert, poster, or screen saver, consider who your audience is and how you can best meet their needs.

Are you targeting nursing staff administering medication, or dispensary staff, presenting information for a specific patient group or the general public? Ask your target audience to review your final draft. For consumers, work with your hospital's consumer liaison team. Posters should have two or three main points and minimal text. Much more detail and it looks like a guideline. Use illustrations and/or colour. Add the publication date.

To effectively communicate using posters or alerts, ask your target audience for feedback.

Pointer #5: Minutes are an official record

Minutes don't have word limits, but if writing minutes, keep your reader in mind when deciding how much detail to include. Staff members are busy and have a lot of documents to read, so will appreciate a concise summary. The minute taker isn't expected to write every word and who said what, but the minutes need to provide an accurate account. Check with previous minutes to see how much detail is expected.

Keep all of the above pointers in mind, as written minutes are on file and are often referred to after the meeting.

As part of the Medication Safety team, you will be writing minutes, reports, posters, and audits. Apply these five pointers to ensure your important Medication Safety messages are effectively communicated to a wide range of audiences.