



DRUG INFORMATION QUESTIONS

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CASE

E.B. is a pharmacy student on the first week of her internal medicine APPE rotation. She has been working hard to keep up to date with her patients every morning before rounds and has been pretty successful integrating with the medical team. So far, her role has mostly been performing medication reconciliation and counseling prior to discharge following a hospital protocol. As she electronically documents a warfarin education session performed with her preceptor, she encounters the intern on her medical team who looks very flustered. He sees her, rushes over, and says, “Oh good, a pharmacist. Can amoxicillin cause muscle pain?” E.B. checks her drug information software on her smartphone and quickly responds that it does not and recommends starting acetaminophen 500 mg every 4 to 6 hours as needed for muscle pain.

WHY IT’S ESSENTIAL

Healthcare professionals and patients look to pharmacists to provide accurate, clear, concise, evidence-based drug information. Pharmacy students on IPPE and APPE rotations will frequently receive requests for drug information. While specialty drug information rotations are often available, skills in drug information are vital to success in all rotations across all practice settings. Developing a comprehensive, systematic approach to answering drug information questions is crucial for success in experiential education, and a strong foundation in drug information can greatly enhance your practice as a licensed professional.

THE SEVEN STEP MODIFIED SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

Developing a comprehensive, systematic approach to answering drug information questions is the best way to ensure that high-quality, evidence-based information is provided to a patient, healthcare professional, or preceptor. It is paramount that only accurate information is provided, especially when that information will be used to make patient care decisions. Although there are other published systematic approaches to providing drug information, the Seven Step Modified Systematic Approach is a well-recognized, frequently used strategy.¹⁻⁴ Although the components of each step are essential to providing high-quality drug information, efforts should be made to achieve a natural flow of professional communication with the requestor and avoid fragmentation of this process, especially as you obtain greater experience.¹

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“Developing my own systematic way to answer drug information questions that come up on rounds has made the process much easier. I used to dread receiving drug information questions until I took the time to think critically about how I was answering them.”—Student

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Step 1: Identify Demographics

Understanding who will be using the information provided is vital to preparing a meaningful drug information response.¹⁻⁴ Although it is often easy to identify the demographics of the requestor if he or she is a preceptor or member of the medical team, you may also receive drug information requests remotely via e-mail or telephone. When receiving a drug information request from an unknown individual, greet that person politely and clarify your role as a pharmacy student. Even though identifying the demographics is listed as the first step in the Modified Approach, it is also appropriate to integrate identification of the demographics throughout the encounter (i.e., Steps 1 through 3). Key information to obtain includes requestor name, education level, affiliation, and role in the context of the question (e.g., patient, caretaker, healthcare provider).

Step 2: Determine Background Information

Once it is clear to whom you are speaking, it is vital to obtain sufficient background information to answer the question.¹⁻⁴ This is often a challenging step, as you must identify the most relevant information when very little is given voluntarily. Additionally, the requestor may not understand why specific background information is needed and may pressure you to rush through this process. A good way to approach this challenge is to first ask the requestor whether his or her question pertains to a specific patient. This question enables the requestor to provide an introduction to the situation and allows you to identify relevant background questions based on the type of question being asked. This step is frequently omitted by students and professionals. Clarifying the appropriate background information is essential in determining the true information needed and responding appropriately.⁵ Suggested relevant background questions for patient-specific inquiries, based on question type, are provided in **Table 5-1**.¹⁻⁴ During this step, it is also important to identify which resources have already been consulted to help clarify the context of the question and possibly prevent duplication of efforts.

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“An effective drug information response is completely dependent on gathering appropriate background information from the requestor.”—Preceptor

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QUICK TIP

For questions received via e-mail, it is often helpful to do a brief literature search before obtaining background information, giving you more context and confidence when discussing the question with the requestor.

One subset of drug information questions that may require a different approach to determining the background information is *assignment-type questions*—in-depth drug information questions assigned as long-term projects to complete throughout the rotation—that are commonly assigned by preceptors of