

IPU highlights important role of pharmacists in advising on medication for older people



The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) is encouraging older people and their families to proactively plan for the management of medications and has urged elderly patients and their families to speak to their community pharmacist if they are unsure about how to take their medicines.

Community Pharmacist and IPU Vice President, Ann Marie Horan explained the importance of people understanding what medication they are taking, “As people get older they are more likely to require multiple medications on a daily basis. Advancements in medications have improved our ability to live with disease and generally increased the duration of our lives. However with multiple medicines, there is an increased chance of side effects or harmful interactions between different medicines.

The #KnowAskCheck IPU campaign (www.safermeds.ie) encourages people to know your medicines and keep a list, check that you are using the right medicine correctly and to ask your pharmacist if you are unsure.

“Taking each medicine as prescribed and following the pharmacists’ instructions is very important in order to minimise any risks and to achieve maximum benefit from the medication. Anyone who is unsure about their medicine or has a query related to their medicine should

always consult their community pharmacist, who will be more than willing to help and give advice on medication management.

“It’s also important to remember that incorrectly taking medicines may reduce their effectiveness. This could mean people are less likely to recover from an illness or it may allow a chronic condition to go untreated. If allowed to continue over a long period of time a patient’s health and quality of life may deteriorate. This illustrates the importance of having ongoing engagement with your pharmacist about your medicines and of taking the medicines as advised.

“A 2012 report by the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing found that 69% of those aged over 50 in Ireland take medications regularly, while one in five frequently take five or more medications. It can be difficult for older people and their families to manage medication so it is important that they talk to their local pharmacist to avoid possible problems and prevent the risk of harmful drug interactions.”

Ann Marie Horan provided the following guidelines for taking medication:

- Always check the label.
- Read the patient information leaflet and ask your pharmacist if you have any questions.
- Take the medicine exactly as prescribed. Don’t take more or less.
- If swallowing tablets is difficult, ask your pharmacist if there is a liquid form of the medicine or whether you could crush your tablets. However, do NOT break, crush or chew tablets without asking a health professional first.
- Try to follow a routine for taking your medicines, e.g. at the same time every day.
- If you miss a dose of your medication, always check with your pharmacist what remedial action you should take, as this action will depend on the medication.
- For tech savvy older people there are many smartphone apps that can assist in managing medication.

Ann Marie Horan concluded by advising older patients or their families to visit their local pharmacy, “Pharmacists are always available to answer any questions you may have about medication. It is essential that older people understand what their medicines are for and raising any concerns they may have will allow them to be in a better position to get the maximum benefit from their medicines and therefore the best health outcome.”