

### BOX 3.1 What You Need to Know About Prescription Medicines

As a health-care professional, you should encourage patients to discuss their medication regimens with their health-care providers. When a new medicine is prescribed, patients can refer to the following list of questions to ask the prescriber or pharmacist.

- What are alternative names for this medication?
- What is it supposed to do?
- Is there a less expensive alternative?
- Why am I taking it?
- How and when do I take the medication and for how long?
- Should I store it in the refrigerator or the cabinet?
- Should I take it with water, food, or with another medication?
- What should I do if I miss or forget a dose?
- What food, drinks, other medications, dietary supplements, or activities should I avoid while taking this medication?
- Will any tests or monitoring be required while I am taking this medication? Do I need to come to the office with a certain frequency?
- What are the possible side effects, and what should I do if they happen?
- When should I expect the medication to start working, and how will I know if it is working?

A disoriented patient may not understand the treatment plan. Therefore, you may need to advocate for the patient. If the patient is frightened or confused, he or she may refuse an injection or to swallow a medication; educating the patient may facilitate understanding.

A patient who is taking an experimental drug has the right to informed consent, which means understanding the treatment, its effects, alternative treatments, and the possible outcome if the treatment is declined. It is essential to document informed consent. Ensure that the patient is comfortable with the decision and that the informed consent is documented correctly. If the patient seems reluctant to sign the consent form, notify the physician of your observation.

### Patient Privacy

Patients have rights to privacy. The **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy Rule** holds health-care professionals accountable to the government to protect the privacy of the patient. Medication records, like all items in the patient's medical record, are to be kept confidential, except for release to pharmacists and other professionals involved in the care of the patient. HIPAA standards also allow patients access to their own medical records and offer them more control over how the information in their records is shared. All health-care providers must supply patients with a notice alerting them to their rights and that medical information cannot be revealed to other people without the patient's consent. For more information on HIPAA, visit <https://www.hhs.gov/>.

Health-care professionals should take the steps necessary to ensure that all communications are confidential. For instance, to call a colleague across a waiting room to announce that a drug is ready for a patient whose name has been called out loud is illegal as well as unprofessional. Patients also have a right to receive medications in a quiet, private place.



#### CRITICAL THINKING

When a patient arrives for an appointment in a clinic or physician's office, what are some ways that they can check in that will maintain their confidentiality?

### Patient Emergencies

If a patient comes to your office or facility and presents with signs of accidental or deliberate medication overdose, you must respond quickly. Refer to office or facility protocols, but usually the first step is to notify the physician immediately and begin the ordered treatment.