



Safe Care Wisconsin NEWS RELEASE



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Group Urges Public: List it. Don't risk it! *Write down your medicines. Carry the list*

MADISON (January 16, 2008) ----- People carry a lot of different lists in their pockets. Grocery lists. Lists of chores and errands. They all find their way into our purses and wallets. But one list you carry could save your life in a medical emergency—a medicine list.

Safe Care Wisconsin, a statewide group of health professionals and organizations dedicated to patient safety, announced today their first statewide health safety project: “List it. Don't Risk it. Write down your medicines.” The project emphasizes the importance of writing down and carrying an accurate list of medications. The medication list project is aimed at getting people who take both prescription and non-prescription medications to write down the name, dose and other important information and to carry the list in their wallets.

The campaign will be bolstered by radio ads and the work of a statewide hospital volunteer group, Partners of Wisconsin Hospital Association. Partner's President Diane Westbrook, River Falls, said her group set a goal of having all 12,000 of their members fill out a medicine list—and then complete one for a friend or family member, for a total of 24,000. Westbrook said her hope is that their efforts will lead to more people in the community recognizing how critical it is to write down and carry a list of medicines.

Information on this project, including a blank medicine list can be downloaded from www.safecarewisconsin.org. In addition, medicine list forms are available at hospitals, medical clinics and pharmacies.

Kathy Leonhardt, MD, MPH is the patient safety officer at Aurora Health Care. She said patients and their family members have a difficult time recalling what prescription and non-prescription medicines they take when asked to help fill out a medical history at the doctor's office.

“Many of us take medicines on a regular basis--either prescribed by a doctor or medications that we select ourselves like vitamins or aspirin, things bought without a prescription. Some of us have to take a lot of medicines to stay healthy--and it can be very confusing- -both for patients and their doctors,” according to Dr. Leonhardt.

“For patients, it can be hard keeping track of all the pills and the instructions for each one. For doctors, they may not know what other doctors have prescribed for a patient or what over-the-counter medicines the patient is taking--unless all that information is given to the doctor at the

time of the visit,” she said. “We all want to be safe when taking medicines, but it is easy to see that mistakes can happen,” Dr. Leonhardt added.

Dr. Leonhardt urges people to keep the list where it can be found quickly, such as in a wallet behind a driver’s license. As an emergency department nurse at the University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics, Heather Grant, RN, knows that seconds count in a medical emergency.

“At any time, you or a family member could have an accident or fall seriously ill and be unable to communicate with emergency responders or personnel in the emergency room. The recent I-90 weather-related multi-vehicle pileup demonstrated how emergencies can take place any time and far from home. We look for every piece of information that we can when a patient comes in to the emergency department. The more we know about the patient, the faster we can treat them. We always worry that a patient is taking medicine that will have a negative reaction with a drug we administer in the ER,” Grant said. “A medication list can truly save your life in an emergency,” she added.

Mike Flint, a registered pharmacist and owner of Mallatt’s Pharmacy in Madison, said the pharmacist is often the last person to talk to a patient before they take home a new prescription. He urges his patients to update and carry a current list of medicines and to note any allergies that they have on the list as well.

“It is very important that you show the pharmacist the list of medications that you are taking, including vitamins and supplements that you purchase that do not require a prescription. It becomes even more important that you show your pharmacist the list if you pick up prescriptions from more than one pharmacy or if you order prescriptions through the Internet. Ask questions about your prescription if you don’t understand how often to take it, or what it is for. Ask your pharmacist to print out a list of medications that you take and use that list to fill out your own list,” Flint said. “Don’t be shy about asking for help in completing your list. Many people have multiple prescriptions, and it is confusing. A list goes a long way in preventing medication errors at home,” he said.

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Safe Care Wisconsin members represent hospitals, physicians, insurers, quality improvement organizations, patient safety organizations, and others committed to ensuring the safety of patients throughout Wisconsin. For more information on Safe Care Wisconsin, visit www.safecarewisconsin.org.