

ISMP Canada Safety Bulletin Supplement

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Sample with Care: Prevent Errors with Medication Samples

In a recent consumer newsletter, Mederror.ca shared risks that can occur when medication samples are given to patients. The newsletter highlighted the potential for patient harm when some members of the health care team are not aware of all the medications a patient is taking.

Incident Example

A patient was given a sample supply of a new anticoagulant by their prescriber. This new medication was intended to replace another anticoagulant. The patient did not understand the instructions and took both medications. Fortunately, the error was discovered, so that the risk of severe bleeding could be managed.



Practice Recommendations for PRESCRIBERS

- **Be selective when providing samples:** Limit the distribution of medication samples to specific patient groups who would benefit most, such as those who are unable to afford their medications.
- **Document, in the electronic medical record, the name and intended duration of any sample medication given to the patient:** This will provide for automated drug interaction and treatment duplication software checks, and the treatment will be captured in the patient's medication history.
- **Follow similar processes for samples as you would when prescribing any other new medication:** Review with the patient the expected benefits and potential side effects, check for potential interactions, and confirm the patient's understanding of associated instructions for use. Consider providing the instructions in writing.
- **Communicate with the patient's pharmacist:** Establish a process for directly informing the patient's primary pharmacy when a medication sample is distributed. This could involve a standardized email or fax, or a note that the patient can share.

Practice Recommendations for PHARMACISTS

- **Update the patient's pharmacy profile:** Document the name and intended duration of a sample medication given to the patient.
- **Encourage patients to ask for a review of their medications when there are changes:** Consider posting the [5 Questions to Ask about Your Medications](#) to help start a conversation about the safety and efficacy of their medications, including samples.



Share the following tips with your patients to help them reduce the risk of error with medication samples:
<https://safemedicationuse.ca/newsletter/downloads/202312NewsletterV14N12-Medication-Samples.pdf>