



Ten Principles of Good Prescribing

In modern healthcare, prescribing is the main way to treat and prevent disease. While medicines can enhance health, they all have the potential to cause harm if used inappropriately. We recommend that healthcare professionals who prescribe medicines should follow these ten principles, which underpin safe and effective use of medicines.

All prescribers should:

- 1. Be clear about the reasons for prescribing**
Establish an accurate diagnosis whenever possible (although this may often be difficult). Be clear about how the patient is likely to benefit from the prescribed medicines
- 2. Take into account the patient's medication history before prescribing**
Obtain an accurate list of current and recent medications (including over the counter and alternative medicines), prior adverse drug reactions and drug allergies from the patient, their carers, or colleagues
- 3. Take into account other factors that might alter the benefits and risks of treatment**
Consider other individual factors that might influence the prescription (for example, physiological changes with age and pregnancy, or impaired kidney, liver, or heart function)



4. Taking into account the patient's ideas, concerns and expectations

Aim to form a partnership with the patient when selecting treatments, making sure that they understand and agree with the reasons for taking the medicine

5. Select effective, safe, and cost-effective medicines tailored to the patient

The likely beneficial effect of the medicine should outweigh the extent of any potential harms, and whenever possible this judgement should be based on published evidence

Only prescribe medicines that are unlicensed, 'off label', or outside standard practice if you are satisfied that another medicine would not meet the patient's needs (this decision will be based on evidence and/or experience of their safety and efficacy)

Choose the best formulation, dose, frequency, route of administration, and duration of treatment

6. Adhere to national guidelines and local formularies where appropriate

Be aware of guidance produced by respected bodies (this is increasingly available via decision support systems), but always consider the individual needs of the patient



Select medicines with regard to costs and needs of other patients (health care resources are finite)

Be able to identify, access, and use reliable and validated sources of information (for example, British National Formulary), and evaluate potentially less reliable information critically

7. **Write unambiguous legal prescriptions using the correct documentation**

Be aware of common factors that cause medication errors and know how to avoid them

8. **Monitor the beneficial and adverse effects of medicines**

Identify how the beneficial and adverse effects of treatment can be assessed

Understand how to alter the prescription as a result of this information

Know how to report adverse drug reactions (in the UK, via the Yellow Card scheme)

9. **Communicate and document prescribing decisions and the reasons for them**

Communicate clearly with patients and their carers, and with your colleagues



Give patients important information about how to take the medicine and what benefits might arise

Advise patients on adverse effects (especially those that will require urgent review), and any monitoring that is required

Use the health record and other means to document prescribing decisions accurately

10. **Prescribe within the limitations of your knowledge, skills and experience**

Always keep the knowledge and skills that are relevant to your practice up to date

Be prepared to seek the advice and support of suitably qualified professional colleagues

Make sure that, where appropriate, prescriptions are checked (for example, calculations of intravenous doses)

www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/ethical-guidance-for-doctors/prescribing-and-managing-medicines-and-devices