

Adapting Medication Communication for MALAYSIA'S DIVERSE PATIENT NEEDS

By: Mdm. Syarifah Syamimi Putri Adiba Binti Syed Putera,
Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Master in Clinical Pharmacy, 2018

Every day, thousands of Malaysians rely on clinics, hospitals and pharmacies for their chronic medications. Yet, for many, communicating about those medicines is far from ideal. While our healthcare system rightly emphasises safety, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness, how we truly connect with patients is often overlooked. Effective medication counselling is a core responsibility of pharmacists, especially in public healthcare settings where managing chronic diseases depends heavily on patients' ability to understand and stick to their prescribed regimens. However, in diverse populations like Malaysia's multicultural and multilingual society, sharing medication information isn't a neutral process. It's profoundly shaped and often constrained by factors such as language proficiency, religious beliefs, age, education level and even access to technology. These variables collectively influence how crucial medication information is received, interpreted and acted upon.

The way information is delivered often presents its own set of challenges. For instance, time-constrained consultations leave little room for patients to ask questions or fully grasp complex instructions. The use of medical jargon can turn clear advice into confusing technicalities. While face masks are essential for safety, they can inadvertently create barriers by obscuring expressions and muffling voices during counselling. These factors collectively make it difficult for individuals to truly understand verbal instructions, especially when managing multiple medications or assisting elderly family members.

Language proficiency stands out as a core concern. While a common language like Bahasa Malaysia is often used, many individuals, particularly within the Chinese and Indian communities, find it challenging to fully comprehend or confidently act on advice not delivered in their mother tongue. This linguistic disconnect can significantly compromise clarity and patient safety. For many, particularly Muslim patients, religious beliefs profoundly influence their perception and acceptance of medication information. Concerns about the halal status of ingredients are significant, and patients often expect pharmacists to proactively address these aspects. Ignoring such considerations can erode trust and affect adherence.

The diverse preferences across generations present a unique challenge. Younger individuals are often keen on leveraging digital tools like mobile apps and QR codes for quick, accessible information. However, older patients typically prefer traditional formats such as face-to-face verbal counselling or printed leaflets. This highlights a clear disparity in digital engagement that necessitates varied communication approaches. An often-overlooked complexity arises from the crucial role of caregivers. These individuals frequently act as the primary recipients of health information, navigating intricate medical instructions on behalf of their aging or dependent relatives. This underscores the vital need for counselling strategies that are inclusive of family dynamics and sensitive to varying levels of health literacy among both patients and their caregivers.



Ultimately, ensuring every Malaysian truly understands their medicine means moving beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to medication communication. We need to embrace flexible and inclusive methods such as developing multilingual resources, fostering culturally respectful dialogue and implementing hybrid models that combine digital tools with traditional face-to-face advice. Equipping pharmacists with enhanced training in health literacy and cultural competence isn't just an improvement; it's essential to build trust, deepen understanding and ensure equitable access to safe medication use for all Malaysians, leading to a healthier and more informed nation.