

NVQ/SVQ Pharmacy Services Level III
UNIT 3.03: Providing Pharmaceutical Information and Advice
Suggested answers to questions

1. Explain what you understand by “understanding the limits of your own role” when obtaining, interpreting and supplying information and advice.

This just means an awareness of the enquiries that could be dealt with by a student technician according to local SOPs. Also an awareness of when an enquiry is beyond the limits of the student technician role or capabilities and in such cases to whom it should be referred. Finally knowing who should check enquiries before information is passed on to the enquirer.

2. When receiving a pharmaceutical enquiry and preparing a response, why is it important to maintain patient confidentiality and how do you ensure that you do so?

All patients have a basic right to confidentiality. When dealing with enquiries relating to patient care it is important not to discuss confidential patient information with anyone who does not “need to know” i.e. you should only discuss anything relating to specific patients with those who are involved in their care. It is also important to ensure that any discussions about patients cannot be overheard. Any documentation/paperwork relating to patients should not be left lying about but should be filed appropriately so that confidentiality is maintained.

3. When receiving a pharmaceutical enquiry, why is it important to follow SOPs?

It is essential that SOPs are followed to ensure that the enquiry answering service is of a sufficiently high standard and that all staff work according to these procedures. SOPs clearly define the roles of various staff types/grades and therefore as well as ensuring quality of work is consistent they offer individuals support for their practice. In MI specifically this will ensure that the correct process for dealing with queries is followed at all times, suitable sources of information are accessed and all required documentation is completed correctly.

4. Please list some of the different people who may approach you with requests for information and how may your response differ?

Healthcare professionals – full medical details should be obtained if the enquiry relates to a patient. Medical terminology may be used.

Patient – if an enquiry directly relates to the patient’s care it may be appropriate to show empathy with them whilst obtaining as much information as possible with sensitive questioning. Care needs to be taken with regard to medical jargon.

Colleague – you may need to know the urgency of the response, whether any other colleagues need to be informed/involved.

5. Why is it important to obtain all the relevant information when receiving a pharmaceutical query?

To ensure you get a full picture of the situation. There may be several factors contributing to the query or problem which may not be immediately apparent to the enquirer.

6. What information would you record on receipt of an enquiry?

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- Enquirer's information – who they are and contact details.
- Patient details (if applicable) including medical history, other medicines.
- The nature of the enquiry and background information and the urgency of the response and any information the enquirer already has.

7. With reference to your SVQ evidence, outline the techniques that you have used to ensure that you got all the relevant information from the people asking for information and advice.

SPT will answer from own experience

8. Why is it important to respond to enquiries within agreed timescales?

If the enquiry is patient specific it should be answered within an agreed timescale because a delay may compromise patient care. Even if the enquiry is not patient specific, it is important to adhere to agreed timescales so that enquirers don't lose confidence and trust in either you as an individual, or the pharmacy department. When agreeing a deadline the needs of the patient, the enquirer and the person responding must be balanced. Occasionally enquirers can be demanding regarding a deadline date and it is important to prepare for such situations and not to promise what you can't deliver. If it is not possible to meet a previously agreed deadline a senior member of staff must be informed and enquirer contacted. If the enquiry is not patient specific an enquirer may be happy to wait a little longer as long as they are kept informed. Dissatisfied customers are often best dealt with by a senior member of staff. *In MI where a large number of enquiries are received they must be prioritised according to the clinical urgency.*

9. What would you do if you had difficulty in dealing with the enquiry?

When providing pharmaceutical information and advice the SPT must be aware of their limitations. There is always the option of discussing a difficult enquiry with a more senior member of staff. However it may be more appropriate to refer the enquiry to a Medicines Information Technician/Pharmacist who has specialist training in information retrieval.

10.1 Who should check your response prior to giving it to the person making the enquiry?

Before qualification all work carried out by an SPT must be checked before release (e.g. prescriptions, aseptic products etc). Requests for information should be treated in the same way. The grade of staff who should check the work will depend on the type of information provided. E.g. requests for information about use of a medicine in a specific patient should be checked by a pharmacist while an information request relating to supply or ward stock issues would be better checked by a senior technician.

10.2 How would you deal with this?

After performing a thorough self check the SPT should request a check from an appropriate member of staff. If unsure who is the most appropriate person this should be discussed with the SVQ assessor.

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11.1 Why is important to show empathy with the person making the enquiry?

Enquirers are more likely to trust your advice if they believe you understand their problem. Developing a rapport with the enquirer also encourages them to discuss the problem more freely, allowing you to more easily ascertain the necessary background information. It is particularly important to show empathy when the enquirer is a patient/member of the public. They may be asking for themselves or on behalf of a friend or relative and if they are anxious, upset or angry they can be difficult to deal with. It may be more appropriate in such cases to refer to a senior member of staff (e.g. senior pharmacist)

11.2 Describe an example of when you have done this and outline the techniques that you used in doing so.

SPT will answer from own experience

12. Why is it important to keep an accurate record of enquiries and responses given?

- It is important to remember that information given may affect the care of patients equally as much as the medicines you dispense for them. It is essential that you have a documented record of the advice given and any work which supports this advice. This may become even more important if an enquirer complains that you gave an incorrect or misleading answer, or were slow to respond. In extreme cases it is worth remembering that good documentation may protect you in any litigation case.
- If the enquirer forgets what you have said or loses your reply, and asks to be reminded of the answer you have a record.
- If you are asked a similar enquiry at a later date the enquiry you have already done may be used to avoid duplication of effort. The person referring to your work must be confident in the information found/answer given.
- To provide workload statistics
- Freedom of Information Act – patients are entitled to access any information recorded/kept about them (e.g. MI enquiries, medical records)