

# Generic Drugs: Common Patient Questions and Encounters



The L.A.S.T. technique is a simple but effective approach for handling difficult questions.

1. **L**ISTEN to the patient's concerns (do not interrupt)
2. **A**CKNOWLEDGE the concern or **A**POLOGIZE as appropriate
3. **S**OLVE—answer the patient's question based on best evidence
4. **T**HANK the patient for bringing up the issue

## Examples of Frequently Asked Questions and Recommended Responses

### *Why does my medicine look different?*

#### **LISTEN**

Ensure you do not interrupt the patient. Demonstrate body language that shows you are listening and taking your patient's concerns seriously.

#### **APOLOGIZE/ACKNOWLEDGE**

"I do see that there are some differences in the appearance of the new brand that you received compared to your previous one. We always do our best to inform our patients of any changes in brand when they occur. I apologize if we did not point out that you received a different brand of your medication this time."

#### **SOLVE**

"The brand we have given you is a generic brand that has the same amount of medication in it as your previous brand and that works the same in your body."

#### **THANK**

"Thank you for pointing this out to us. You should always let us know if there is something about your medication that is not what you expected."

### *Why is the name on my medicine bottle different from what was written on my prescription?*

#### **LISTEN**

Ensure you do not interrupt the patient. Demonstrate body language that shows you are listening and taking your patient's concerns seriously.

#### **APOLOGIZE/ACKNOWLEDGE**

"I can see how this might be confusing. I apologize that we did not explain this to you when you were dispensed this prescription."

#### **SOLVE**

"Please allow me to explain. All drugs have a chemical or drug name and a brand name. For example, Advil® is a brand name, but the name for the drug that is in Advil® is ibuprofen. There are many different brands of ibuprofen; another brand is Motrin®. Doctors often put brand names on prescriptions because that is how they are marketed, and it is what doctors are most familiar with. That is what has happened here. The doctor has written the brand name of the drug on your prescription." (If patient wants more proof, showing him/her the brand name bottle with the drug name written underneath is a good approach.)

#### **THANK**

"Thank you for bringing this to our attention. You should always let us know if you feel anything about your medication is not what you expected, and we appreciate that."

## *This medicine is for a family member. Will you please give me what is written on the prescription?*

### **LISTEN**

Ensure you do not interrupt the patient. Demonstrate body language that shows you are listening and taking your patient's concerns seriously.

### **APOLOGIZE/ACKNOWLEDGE**

"I can understand your concern about making sure that you bring home the prescription medicine that your family member is expecting."

### **SOLVE**

"The doctor has written the brand name of the drug on this prescription that he/she wants your family member to have. The brand name of the drug is Pantoloc®. You can see from this bottle that the name of the drug is pantoprazole. Insurance companies require that we dispense the generic product when available, because it is equally safe and effective but is a fraction of the price. It is of the same quality as the brand name drug but less expensive because the patent on the brand name drug has expired. This allows less expensive brands to be brought to market."

### **THANK**

"Thank you for allowing me to explain that one medicine can exist as either a brand name or a generic medication and that the two are equivalent in safety and effectiveness."

## *Is there a way to get the "real drug"? I have had a bad experience with "substitutes" in the past.*

### **LISTEN**

Ensure you do not interrupt the patient. Demonstrate body language that shows you are listening and taking your patient's concerns seriously.

### **APOLOGIZE/ACKNOWLEDGE**

"I'm sorry to hear that you have had a bad experience with a prescription medication in the past. Can you tell me more about that?"  
(Allow patient to answer, and practise active listening.)

### **SOLVE**

"So that I'm clear, by 'real drug' you are referring to the branded product, and by 'substitutes' you are referring to the generic equivalent? I can assure you that the quality of generic medications meets the same high standards as those of brand name medications. In fact, they are only two different brands of the same product. Health Canada monitors not only the quality of the medications, but also the standards of the manufacturing facilities very closely. Let's look at the reaction that you had to the medication and the potential causes."

### **THANK**

"Thank you for bringing up your concern with me. You should always let us know whenever you are concerned about an issue with your medication. We are only too pleased to help."

## *Will you please give me the brand name? My condition is too fragile to take chances.*

### **LISTEN**

Ensure you do not interrupt the patient. Demonstrate body language that shows you are listening and taking your patient's concerns seriously.

### **APOLOGIZE/ACKNOWLEDGE**

"I can understand why you would want to be careful with your medical condition. All medication needs to be treated with respect and used appropriately."

### **SOLVE**

"I can assure you that generic medications meet the same high quality standards as brand name medications do, and they are proven to have the same clinical effects and safety as their brand name equivalents. Our pharmacy team wants you to have the very best health outcome possible, and that is equally achievable with a generic medication or a brand name medication. In fact, in the vast majority of cases, hospitals use generic drugs whenever they are available. What, in particular, have you heard about differences between brand name and generic medications?"

### **THANK**

"Thank you for bringing this up and allowing me to explain that generic and brand name drugs are associated with equal benefits and safety."

## ***Will non-active ingredients affect how my medication works?***

### **LISTEN**

Ensure you do not interrupt the patient. Demonstrate body language that shows you are listening and taking your patient's concerns seriously.

### **APOLOGIZE/ACKNOWLEDGE**

"What I am hearing is that you are concerned about the possibility that non-active ingredients could affect your medication."

### **SOLVE**

"All non-active ingredients must meet rigorous testing and national standards. In many cases, the same non-active ingredients as are used in the brand name drug are used—often from the exact same supplier. Although rare, it is possible that some people are sensitive to certain ingredients."

### **THANK**

"Thank you for checking with us. Please be sure that we are aware of any allergies that you might have."

## ***Why do generic drugs cost less than brand name drugs?***

### **LISTEN**

Ensure you do not interrupt the patient. Demonstrate body language that shows you are listening and taking your patient's concerns seriously.

### **APOLOGIZE/ACKNOWLEDGE**

"I can understand your concern that a product that is less expensive may not be as high quality as brand name drugs."

### **SOLVE**

"When a company invents a new medication, it has to recoup its research investment, which is why brand name drugs are protected by patents and their prices are higher. When the patent expires, generic versions of the drug can be produced. The generic drug manufacturers can use much of the research that has already been conducted, allowing them to offer patients greatly reduced costs for the same medicine—on average, costs that are 60% to 80% lower. This saves you, your employer and the government money that can be invested elsewhere."

### **THANK**

"Thank you for checking with us. Please be sure to raise any medication concerns with us."

## ***I have a card here that will pay for the brand name. Does my doctor want me to get the brand name because the generic is of lower quality?***

### **LISTEN**

Ensure you do not interrupt the patient. Demonstrate body language that shows you are listening and taking your patient's concerns seriously.

### **APOLOGIZE/ACKNOWLEDGE**

"I can see how you might think that the brand name is of higher quality if the doctor has provided you with a card that allows you to receive it."

### **SOLVE**

"The brand name manufacturers provide doctors with these cards because the patent on their drug has expired, and they do not want to lose business to the manufacturers of generic versions of the drug. The brand name company has a number of years to market their drug exclusively, because they had research expenses that they need to recoup. When that time expires, other companies are able to make the same medication for a less expensive price. The generic drugs are subject to the same high quality standards imposed by Health Canada as the brand name drugs. So it is up to you if you would like to use the brand name drug card, but be aware that it may be costing your third-party drug plan, which is paid by your employer, more money for the same medicine. If your employer pays more than necessary for drugs, there may be less money available to pay for other benefits in the future, such as vision, dental or expensive specialty medicines."

### **THANK**

"Thank you for allowing me to explain the concept and the implications of brand name loyalty cards to you."