

## THE VALUE OF A PHARMACIST

A Pharmacist is an important part of any person's medical care but he/she is especially invaluable in a transplant patient's life. The first line of defense for a transplanted person when problems arise during daily life is a good pharmacist. Every transplant patient should have a pharmacist that knows their care needs handling their medicine.

This is just one of many examples of how our pharmacist has been wonderful. I realized that my son needed a liquid form of a medicine that had to stay cold. I knew that would not fit into our life style. From experience with my other children, I knew I could forget medicines that had to be kept in the refrigerator. So I told my pharmacist the problem, and he said he could make this particular medicine so that it would be stable for two weeks. This way it would not need to be refrigerated or put on ice when we traveled.

That made life easier and also insured that my son got all the medicines he required on time.

My son was born with congenital heart disease. He

experienced three surgeries and then had a heart transplant two weeks before his second birthday. I already knew the value of an experienced pharmacist because my son had been on some type of medication his whole life. When he was one year old we moved to a new town. As soon as I knew the area we would be living in I found a pharmacy. I made sure we had a pharmacist even before we had a house to live in. That is how necessary I knew it was.

I picked a local pharmacy not a chain because I wanted the same person helping me, not a group rotating in and out. I went in with paper copies of my son's prescriptions to make sure the pharmacy could stock his medicines.

When my son was transplanted fifteen years ago his medical team would not discharge him until they had talked to our pharmacist. After the heart transplant surgeon and the cardiologist, our pharmacist as been the most important medical professional involved in my son's life.

These are a few things you should consider when deciding if you have the right pharmacy to help with your transplant prescriptions.

\* If you do not have a pharmacist find one you can trust before your operation. Explain that you will be

transplanted and make sure they can get the medicines you will need.

\* Your pharmacist needs to be willing to talk to you, listen to you and not be so busy he/she cannot discuss your special needs.

\* Make every effort to have a one-on-one relationship with your pharmacist, meaning not a chain pharmacy if possible. We had to change our pharmacy because of insurance coverage at one point. We used a chain for a year and the same person did not fill my son's prescriptions twice.

\* Our pharmacist has caught, on more than one occasion, problems or possible issues with my son's medicines. A doctor had prescribed an antibiotic that did not interact well with my son's immunosuppression medicines. Our pharmacist spotted a problem and prevented a possible deadly situation before it occurred. He called the doctor requesting a different antibiotic be used.

\* Tell your pharmacist if you are having a problem with your medicines. They may have an idea that helps. When my son was first transplanted he was so small he needed a pediatric dose of medicine that had to be mixed using a pestle and mortar. Our pharmacist mixed liquid cherry syrup with the crushed tablets. On my next visit he asked me how

my son liked it. I told him he really made a face and it was hard to get him to take a dose. Our pharmacist sent an employee to the grocery store to buy wild cherry syrup for the next mixture. My son had no problem taking the medicine the next time. The special attention made a difference in how well my day went and whether or not my son got a full dose, because taking his medicines was not an issue any more.

\* A good pharmacist can also detect when a patient may not be taking their medicines correctly. Teenage compliance is a real problem. In my son's case it was our pharmacist that noticed my son was not taking one of his medicines. The pharmacy records indicted that the medicine had not needed to be refilled as it should have been.

\* Because anti-rejection medicines are so expensive and there is not a huge demand for them do not assume that they will be sitting on the shelf of every pharmacy. Always have enough to last you if you are on vacation. Carry a couple of days extra to allow for any problems. Always have it with you, not in checked baggage or under the bus, but with you, always. I looked one whole afternoon for Imuran in Key West, Florida and did not find it. My son had enough for that day. I had hoped we would not have to go into Miami to get it but we did locate it there the next day.

\* Carry a paper copy of your prescriptions with you when you travel. Your pharmacist can easily give you a printed list.

\* Have the pharmacist's telephone number with you also, often it is easier to contact them than it is the transplant coordinator if you just need a refill while out of town. I know two numbers by heart - my mother's and our pharmacist's.

\* It is best to give your pharmacy a call three or four days before your refill is due so they will have it on hand and you don't have to wait while they fill your medicines.

\* Every pharmacist is human and can make mistakes. Take the time to check that your medicines are the right color, size or number.

Most important: Find a great pharmacist. My son has one.