Chapter 1 - What is the purpose of this book?
What is the purpose of this book?

We are all grateful for the development and introduction of effective medications by the pharmaceutical industry. The development and marketing of many prescription medications has benefited patients as well as society. These medications have improved the quality of care, and we now have effective treatment alternatives for a large number of medical conditions. New medications can alleviate troubling symptoms, improve your quality of life, cure many acute conditions, reduce disease complications, and even prolong your life. This development is largely the result of a successful pharmaceutical industry, though these impressive advances are partially offset by two important factors. First, nearly half of all patients do not receive optimal treatment. Second, all medications have negative or adverse effects, some very serious. Unfortunately, the process of gaining knowledge and informing consumers about these undesirable effects needs to be improved. As a consumer, you have the right to be fully informed about a medication’s potential benefits and its potential harm.

What are the objectives of this book?

This book is primarily intended for two audiences. First, it provides you and your family with information needed to make wise decisions about medications and to optimize the treatment experience by alerting you to potential adverse effects and by finding affordable medications. This book differs from other books about drugs written for the general public because it is not a compilation of often outdated information about medications. The goal is to help you critically evaluate the safety and effectiveness of prescription medications and show you how to keep current on the medications you are taking. Second, the book offers a broad perspective about medications for students in the health field, health care providers, policy makers, health journalists and others.

We begin the section on Knowing Your Medications by discussing how physicians make treatment decisions (Chapter 2) and where you can find information about medications (Chapters 3 and 4). After a review of the types of benefits medications offer (Chapter 5), there is a discussion about treatment alternatives (Chapters 6-8), followed by information on safety issues (Chapters 9-11). The next section addresses Special Considerations for certain patient groups (Chapters 12-15). The third section, Buying Your Medication, is intended to help you limit your medication costs (Chapters 16-23). The next
section, *Responding to Treatment*, explains how patients may differ in their treatment responses, factors that influence these responses, and some associated risks (Chapters 24-34). Later, in *Facing Challenges*, we discuss special issues that you may encounter (Chapters 35-40). The importance of taking your medications as prescribed is addressed in the section on *Following Treatment Recommendations* (Chapters 41-45). Later, we offer two sections that review topics of special interest, *Documenting Medication Effects* (Chapters 46-49) and *Regulations* (Chapters 50-59). In Chapter 60, we summarize our recommendations to you. The final chapter focuses on ways in which the use of medications can be improved in the future.

It is our sincere hope that either reading this book in its entirety or going through select chapters, will make you a more informed consumer and patient. This, in turn, may increase the likelihood that you will benefit from your medications.

**How is the information presented?**

We have chosen to present information using a question and answer format. We identified 59 commonly posed questions and answered these in brief, based on current knowledge. All questions are broad and do not address specific medications. Many questions regarding individual drugs are addressed in the medication’s Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved package insert or professional product label. In Chapters 3 and 4, we refer you to other sources for medication-specific information.

We have done our best to avoid highly technical language. Key medical and scientific terms are defined in the Glossary (Appendix A). For those eager to learn more about a specific topic, we suggest additional reading material in the Reference section at the end of the book.

**How is the book intended to be used?**

You may decide to focus your reading on questions of special interest to you. To accommodate this approach, we have tried to make each chapter freestanding. Thus, the book has some repetition from chapter to chapter. If you have a broader interest in medications, you may want to read the book from beginning to end.

If our book does not address all of your questions, we would like to hear from you. New questions of broader interest can be added to the next edition. Feel free to contact us with additional questions online at www.knowingyourmedications.com