

# Antibiotic Stewardship – Patient Communication Strategies



Communication Strategy	Examples
Statement of empathy	<p><i>"I understand you're uncomfortable. Being sick is not fun."</i></p> <p><i>"Several other patients have come in with the same symptoms as you. It sounds like something is going around."</i></p>
Review Symptoms and State Diagnosis	<p><i>"Your lungs sound clear so I don't suspect pneumonia. Your symptoms suggest you have a cold."</i></p> <p><i>"I don't see inflammation in your throat and your strep test was negative. This sore throat is caused by a viral infection."</i></p>
Course of Action	<p><i>"A sore throat can be soothed with ice chips or lozenges. Gargling with salt water and drinking warm beverages can also provide relief."</i></p> <p><i>"Putting a warm compress over the nose and forehead can help relieve sinus pressure."</i></p> <p><i>"Take ibuprofen, drink plenty of fluids, and rest."</i></p>
Explain why antibiotics won't help	<p><i>"This is a bad cold; antibiotics won't help you feel better."</i></p> <p><i>"Your symptoms suggest that this is a viral infection. Antibiotics won't help your infection."</i></p> <p><i>"Your lab test is negative (i.e. strep test), which means your infection is viral and antibiotics won't help."</i></p> <p><i>"Antibiotics can do a lot of harm if you take them when you don't need them. They can cause an allergic reaction or upset your GI system causing severe diarrhea."</i></p> <p><i>"Antibiotics are precious resources. Using them when they may not help could cause superbugs to multiply. If you get a serious infection in the future – the antibiotics we need to stop the infection might not work anymore."</i></p>
Contingency Plan	<p><i>"Your infection will likely resolve on its own, but if you do not start feeling better in three or four days, come back and we can reassess your need for antibiotics."</i></p> <p><i>"If you develop a fever or your symptoms worsen please call the office to set up an appointment so we can evaluate your symptoms."</i></p>



**Patient:** *“I’ve had this respiratory infection before – no fever, green mucous and a lot of coughing and sneezing. I’ve missed work the last couple days. Last month when I was here Dr. Smith gave me an antibiotic and the next day I felt better.”*

**Physician:** *“I understand your frustrations with not feeling well and missing work. Several patients have come in this week with the same symptoms as you. You don’t have a fever, so your symptoms suggest you have a viral infection. The bad news is that antibiotics won’t cure a viral infection. The good news is that there are different treatments you can use to treat your symptoms. Try to drink plenty of fluids, get some rest, use a vaporizer, and gargle with salt water. Taking antibiotics when they are not appropriate can cause stomach upset or severe diarrhea. As physicians – we are reconsidering how we’re using antibiotics. If you are not feeling well in a couple days, call the office and we can reevaluate whether or not you need antibiotics.”*

Fleming-Dutra, K., Mangione-Smith, R., Hicks, L. (2016, August 1). How to prescribe fewer unnecessary antibiotics: Talking points that work with patients and their families. *American Family Physician*. 2016; 94(3): 200-202.

New York State Department of Health. (2016, October 28). Educating patients about antibiotic use. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHYmb2OKoMU>.