

Patient non-adherence has reached crisis proportions in the U.S. and around the world

With only 50 percent of Americans taking their medications as prescribed by their physicians¹, poor adherence – particularly for chronic conditions – can lead to major health ramifications, including disease progression and complications, reduced functional abilities, lower quality of life, and even death.² Disease complications and hospitalizations as a result of not taking medication as prescribed may lead to significant financial consequences, including additional co-pays and high out of pocket healthcare costs. In fact, it's estimated that non-adherence has led to approximately \$290 billion annually in direct and indirect costs to the economy.³

There are many reasons why patients don't comply with the medication therapies prescribed by physicians. Age, side effects, negative beliefs about the medication, and low health literacy are common barriers to medication adherence. Furthermore, the rise in healthcare costs can make it more difficult for patients to adhere to their medication therapies as more people are implementing their own cost saving strategies such as splitting pills and skipping doses without consulting their doctors. However, there are a number of resources patients can leverage to help them overcome common barriers to medication adherence.

Empowering the Patient: Simple Steps to Staying Adherent & Healthy

- **Find a Doctor You Trust:** Many of us have excellent relationships with our doctors, but given the amount of time that physicians often have to spend with each patient, many may not. If you find yourself unable to be honest with your doctor about specific challenges you face in staying adherent to your medication—as a result of feeling intimidated or because you don't receive the support you need—it may be time to find a new doctor. Visit sites such as the American Medication Association DoctorFinder at www.ama-assn.org, or the WeBMD Physician Directory at webmd.com. Also, consider asking a trusted relative or friend about their experiences and if they would refer their doctor. Research shows that a positive relationship with your doctor is directly tied to medication adherence.
- **Ask your Doctor:** As mentioned above, taking your prescription as prescribed by your doctor can often become challenging due to the cost of the medication. As a result, many pharmaceutical manufacturers sponsor free programs to assist patients who may not be able to afford their medication(s). Ask your doctor if they have free samples or vouchers that will pay for your initial prescription. Further, many physicians also have access to programs in which, if you are eligible, the manufacturer will pay for a portion or all of the co-pay. In addition to instant cost savings, these programs often provide opt-in support such as reminders about when to renew prescriptions, disease and medication therapy education, and even clinical support to manage side effects. Of course, doctors are also a great educational resource so ensure you ask all the important questions on your mind about your prescribed medication before you leave the exam room.
- **Tap into Your Pharmacist:** Pharmacists are the most trusted, affordable and accessible healthcare resource for patients in America, however, they are often the most under-utilized resource. Pharmacists are available to consult with patients about medication questions and concerns, how they can better manage taking multiple medications, find lower-cost generic alternatives, and provide nutritional and exercise advice. Some pharmaceutical manufacturers

¹ World Health Organization. (2003). Adherence to Long Term Therapy: Evidence for Action. http://www.who.int/chronic_conditions/adherencereport/en/.

² Gatti ME, Jacobson KL, Gazmararian JA, Schmotzer B, Kripalani S. *American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy*. 2009;66:657-664.

³ New England Health Institute. (2009). Thinking Outside the Pillbox: A System-wide Approach to Improving Patient Medication Adherence for Chronic Disease.

have sponsored targeted patient education messaging around the importance of adherence and taking medication properly via pharmacy-administered counseling programs as one way to address non-adherence. The results of these programs have been significant. One study demonstrated that patients who spoke to a community pharmacist about their 90-day smoking cessation drug therapy experienced higher drug adherence rates and thus were more likely to stop smoking than patients who didn't speak to a pharmacist about their prescribed therapy.

- **Visit Online Communities:** The majority of U.S. healthcare consumers turn to the Web to gather and share health information. Understanding and learning how other patients are coping with a similar condition or disease can be very helpful in treatment and recovery. Depending on an individual's comfort level, there are a variety of ways to access support online. Some examples of community sites include Wellsphere (www.wellsphere.com); informational and rating sites like Medications.com (www.medications.com); and personal health management sites, such as Patients Like Me (www.patientslikeme.com).
- **Make Adherence a Priority:** Often times, many of us are so busy that when it comes to taking care of ourselves, we can be last on the list. In reality, we can have access to credible information, resources and support, but it is our decision whether or not to take our medication. Although there are many things that go into this decision making process, ultimately we are in control. Our challenge is to keep adherence top of mind for the long term. Several ways to do this include reminding yourself of the importance of taking your medication as prescribed, remembering your long-term goals, putting reminders where you will see them daily, and asking a spouse or loved one to help you stay on track.
- **Leverage Brand Resources** Many pharmaceutical manufacturers have support programs that provide disease and medical education, in addition to previously mentioned cost savings. This information has been approved through their legal and regulatory department, as well as the FDA. Often times, these programs also have opt-in support such as text, e-mail or mobile reminders about when to renew prescriptions. Additionally, pharmaceutical Web sites for brand medications may have information and eligibility criteria for patient assistance programs. Or, you can visit *Partnership for Prescription Assistance* (www.pparx.com) to connect to both private and public assistance programs.

Many of the manufacturer programs and assets identified above are powered by McKesson Patient Relationship Solutions, a business of McKesson Corporation, a Fortune 15 company with 176 years of healthcare experience. McKesson Patient Relationship Solutions partners with pharmaceutical manufacturers to develop unique and innovative solutions that address patient non-adherence to medication. Our programs are rooted in the principles of health behavior change--we seek to provide the right message and intervention to the right patient at the right time, helping to overcome barriers to poor medication adherence. For patients, this approach means that they receive the most relevant medication information and support when they need it most to help them stay adherent to their prescribed medication(s). And, for manufacturers, this means that they can build stronger relationships with consumers through a variety of touch points and channels. Our number one goal at McKesson Patient Relationship Solutions is to support patients in improving and maintaining their health by strengthening their relationships with doctors and pharmacists.