

Why Aren't Patients Taking Their Medication?

By David Sheon | Mar 14, 2013

It's a question with which many in the health care community grapple. In some cases, it's a matter of affordability, as the high cost of certain therapies makes it difficult to pay for needed drugs AND to pay for essentials like rent or the mortgage, utilities and food. Even with medical insurance, the copays for these expensive therapies put them well out of reach for many Americans.

In other cases, it's a matter of easy access to refills – a problem being solved, in part, by mail-order pharmacies. This was especially the case among 44,000 hypertension patients recently studied by Kaiser Permanente. Research found that making prescription refills more affordable and easier to access might reduce disparities in medicine-taking behaviors among racial and ethnic groups.

The study authors noted that as early as the first refill, some patients are forgoing their hypertension medication. The result? According to the CDC, hypertension can lead to heart attacks, strokes and deaths related to cardiovascular disease. The impact is devastating to communities of color, particularly among African Americans, where males have the highest hypertension death rates of any other racial, ethnic or gender group.

The research found that both mail-order pharmacy enrollment and lower copayments were associated with a significantly lower likelihood of being non-adherent.

Said the study authors, "Our findings suggest that while racial and ethnic differences in medication adherence persist – even in settings with high-quality care – interventions such as targeted copay reductions and mail order pharmacy incentives have the potential to reduce disparities in blood pressure."

If you're in the health care field, what ideas have you seen put in action that work to improve treatment compliance? As a patient, have you ever stopped taking your medication due to high cost or hassles getting refills? And have you turned to mail-order pharmacies or copay assistance programs for help?

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