

Tip #16: Promoting Adherence to a Medication Regimen

The Risk: Patient nonadherence to a prescribed medication regimen is a common problem that physicians in all specialties encounter. Some factors that may influence medication adherence include the complexity of the regimen, the age of the patient, and the cost of medications. Patients and/or caregivers should be advised of the importance of taking medications exactly as directed. Educating patients regarding the use of medications should include information about potential drug interactions, side effects, and other related problems that may warrant medical intervention.

Recommendations:

1. Prescribing providers should educate patients about each medication, including its name, appearance, purpose, and effect. This education should include any potential side effects and/or interactions associated with the medication regimen. It should also stress the importance of contacting a healthcare provider should any reactions, questions or concerns arise.
2. Query patients regarding any underlying issues with medication selection in order to resolve any concerns.
3. The importance of using only one pharmacy to obtain all medications should be emphasized to patients or their representatives.
4. Patients should also be advised to:
 - keep an accurate list of all medications including generic and brand names, over-the-counter medications, and herbal supplements, which includes dosages, dosing frequency, and the reasons for taking the medication;
 - maintain a complete list of medical providers and their contact information;
 - post the name and telephone number of their local pharmacy in a prominent location along with the name and phone number of their physician;
 - establish a daily routine when taking their medications; and
 - bring a list of all medications that they are taking to each and every appointment.

5. Make patients aware of the various medication adherence aids and devices available, such as dosing reminders, pill boxes, and refill reminder programs.
6. Provide useful written information in plain language that clearly explains how patients can correctly manage their medications.
7. Consider utilizing the “teach back method” when explaining medications to patients. First teach the information, then ask patients to repeat it back in their own words.
8. Physicians should help patients manage their medications, caution them to not share medications, and advise them to follow storage recommendations and dispose of old medications properly.