



Best Practices to Improve Medication Adherence

Patients who adhere to their medications have better health outcomes and quality of life, as well as lower unnecessary medical costs. It is for these reasons that medication adherence continues to be a key measure in State and Federal quality programs. To help you improve medication adherence for your patients, Healthfirst has identified strategies and best practices around medication adherence.

When prescribing medications, what approach should I take to help my patients be adherent?

- Introduce a collaborative approach with the patient. Try to understand, and provide solutions to, any barriers the patient may be facing with regard to medication adherence.
- Be sure to encourage patients to talk honestly, without fear of stigma, about economic challenges that they are currently facing, or that they may face in the future, that would affect them taking their medications.
- Involve patients in decision making regarding their medications so that they have a sense of ownership and of being a partner in the treatment plan.
- Simplify medication taking; use the most simplified regimen possible based on the patient's health and medication needs.
- Tailor the medication plan to the patient's daily routine and lifestyle, and try to minimize disruption to the patient's daily schedule.

- When appropriate, consider and prescribe generic medications. Please access Healthfirst's Formularies to see a comprehensive list of medications by drug tier.

What information should I share with my patients when prescribing medications?

- Address key information about the drugs (what, why, when, how, and how long).
- Inform the patient of the common side effects; patients who are non-adherent frequently stop taking their medications if they experience side effects they may not have known about.
- Additionally, if a member feels no side effects, please assure them that the medication is working and that they need to stay on their regimen.

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What are some tips or tools I can use to help my patients adhere to their medications?

- Use medication adherence aids such as:
 - Medication calendars or schedules that specify the day and time to take medications
 - Comprehensive drug cards or medication charts that have information on the medications the patient is taking, and on when and how these should be taken
 - Unit-of-use packaging such as daily or weekly pill boxes
 - Medication containers with alarms that alert the patient when it's time for their medication

How can I keep track of my patients' medication adherence?

- Ensure that medication regimens are discussed during every visit.
- Identify and address difficulties and barriers related to adherence.
- Conduct "Brown Bag" consults
 - Patients are asked to bring all of their medications or specific medications so they can review them with their doctor during their visit
 - The doctor or nurse reviews each medication with the patient so that the patient understands the importance of taking them and the consequences of non-adherence
- Request patient-level adherence information from the patient's health plan.

What if my patients are non-adherent because they forget to pick up their prescription and/or have issues making it to the pharmacy on time?

- Prescribe the patient a 90-day supply; this limits the amount of times the patient will have to pick up their medication from the pharmacy.
- Encourage patients to switch to mail order so they can have their prescriptions delivered to their home.
- If the patient is on multiple medications, synchronize when these are due to be refilled and picked up from the pharmacy so that the patient is able to pick up all their medications in one trip.
- Involve the patient's caregivers, who would be able to help remind the patient to pick up their medication.

As soon as my patients feel better, they stop their medicines without telling me. How can I deal with this proactively?

- At every visit, explain to the patient why it is important to continue to take their medication even if they are feeling better.
- If the patient is considering stopping their medication, ask them to first consult you before making the decision.

Resources

Visit www.healthfirst.org/providers/clinical-partnerships/spectrum-health for additional information on how to improve the health and well-being of our members. Resources on medication adherence include:

- Improving Outcomes for Type 2 Diabetes
- Improving Outcomes for Hypertension
- Patient Self-Efficacy: Key Factor to Promote Medication Adherence
- Control of Chronic Illness: Medication Adherence