

## 2009 Talk about Prescriptions Month – Communication is Key

### National Consumers League – National Medication Adherence Campaign

Despite decades of research and extensive efforts by both public and private entities - in the health care industry and beyond, millions of Americans either fail to take the full course of medication prescribed by their doctors, or they take it incorrectly. Poor medication adherence often leads to a more rapid worsening of disease and can even cause premature death.<sup>1</sup> It results in higher health care expenses for everyone, from patients to health plans and employers. **Poor medication adherence costs the U.S. at least \$300 billion annually<sup>2</sup>, or 13% of total health care expenditures.<sup>3</sup>** More specifically,

- Nearly 3/4 of Americans report they don't take their medications as directed<sup>4</sup>
- One in three never fill their prescriptions<sup>5,6</sup>
- For common chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension, proper adherence averages only 50-65 percent<sup>7,8</sup>
- 33-69% of medication-related hospital admissions are linked to poor adherence<sup>9</sup>

Failure to follow medication regimes is especially harmful to people with chronic health conditions. When those with chronic conditions fail to follow their medication regimen, they risk decreased productivity, a lesser quality of life, a more rapid progression of their condition, complications, hospitalization, and even death. Employers are seeing billions of dollars lost to chronic condition-related absenteeism and presenteeism (when employees report for work, but do not function at full capacity). It is estimated that diabetes accounts for 120 million work days lost every year to presenteeism.<sup>10</sup>

The reasons for poor adherence are numerous, and powerfully affected by many factors – the disease or condition being treated, the presence or absence of visible symptoms and side effects, the cost of the medications being prescribed, the difficulty of administering the medication, and more. Thus, improving Americans' medication adherence will require a multifaceted approach in which consumer education and engagement is central.

There is nearly universal agreement that increasing patient adherence could lead to improved health outcomes and lower overall health costs. Safer and more effective medication use through improved adherence can:

- Help workers and their families stay healthy so they can experience better outcomes, as well as greater productivity and fewer absences from work

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<sup>1</sup> Osterberg, L. and Blaschke, T., Adherence to Medication, New England Journal of Medicine 353:487-97 (2005)

<sup>2</sup> Balkrishnan, R., The Importance of medication adherence in improving chronic disease related outcomes, Med Care 43:517-20 (2005)

<sup>3</sup> NEHI paper ADD CITE

<sup>4</sup> National Community Pharmacists Association and Pharmacists for the Protection of Patient Care Adherence Survey (2006).

<sup>5</sup> Infomedics Survey (2008)

<sup>6</sup> Balkrishnan, R.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Sabate E., et. al., Adherence to Long-Term Therapies, World Health Organization (2003)

<sup>9</sup> Osterberg, L. and Blaschke, T., Adherence to Medication, New England Journal of Medicine 353:487-97 (2005)

<sup>10</sup> "Economic Costs of Diabetes in the US in 2007." Diabetes Care 2008.

- Keep patients out of emergency rooms and hospital beds, lowering long-term health care costs, and freeing health care resources to address injuries and illnesses that are not as easily preventable
- Reduce dangerous drug interactions and slow the development of drug resistance
- Lower overall health care costs of the employer through improving the health outcomes – and outlooks – of employees

Answering NCPIE's call for awareness building, as set out in the 2007 NCPIE report, the National Consumers League – with planning funds from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality – is developing a national education campaign to help raise the level of awareness about the importance of adherence among consumers.

The campaign will broadly make consumers aware of the importance of taking their medications as prescribed. The campaign aims to illustrate how this simple act can lead to better overall health. In light of the recent economic situation, there is also the potential for illustrating the long-term savings when medications are taken as directed and health conditions are managed in their early phases. Unfortunately, many consumers have been cutting pills, skipping doses, etc., all of which can lead to very costly, and even deadly, outcomes.

The campaign hopes to encourage consumers to engage with their health care practitioners, their employers, and their community, to help find tools that work for them to best manage their health.

Recognizing that communication is key, the adherence campaign will encourage consumers to talk to their health care practitioners (including doctor, pharmacist, nurse, nurse practitioner) about taking medications appropriately and managing their health. An individual will also be asked to evaluate how they are managing their medications and their health. They will be directed to visit the campaign website for more information, including how they can reach out to those in their community (their health care practitioners, family, employers and HR benefit managers, and others) to learn about ways in which they can best manage their medications.