



Wednesday, January 14, 2004

## Follow instructions when taking medicine

The process seems fairly straightforward. The doctor writes a prescription, and the pharmacist fills out. It would seem all that is left for the patient to do is take the medicine. But most pharmacists would point out the patient's responsibility doesn't end there.

Patients play an important role in ensuring they get the best health care possible. It's up to them to ask questions when they go to their doctor's office. When physicians write prescriptions, patients should make sure they understand what the medicine is for and how to take it.

Patients tend to underestimate the importance of proper prescription use, but noncompliance with medication instructions can lead to complications and even hospitalization. Studies show that by the time the patient gets from the doctor's office to the pharmacy, many have forgotten half of the doctor's instructions about their prescribed medication. In fact, up to half of the people who use medications don't use them properly, the Federal Food & Drug Administration says.

Estimates of the costs of noncompliance range from \$50 billion to \$100 billion a year in this country. These costs are passed on to health-care consumers through higher medical bills and medical benefit premiums. But there are ways to make a difference:

- Every time your doctor prescribes a new drug, make sure he or she has an up-to-date list of all the drugs you're taking.
- Women should let the doctor know if they are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Have all of your prescriptions filled at the same pharmacy every time. This makes it possible for the staff to check for drug interactions.
- Make sure the pharmacist has your medication allergies on file in the computer.
- Make sure the medication is dispensed is the one your doctor prescribed. Read the label. If you're still not sure, check with the pharmacist.
- Be sure that you understand the directions on the label. For example, if the directions read "four doses daily," you would want to ask if you take it every six hours around the clock or just during waking hours.
- Ask the pharmacist the best way to measure liquids. Many household silverware "teaspoons" don't hold the full amount. Special syringes or other devices ensure you get the right dosage.
- Check to see if you should avoid certain foods or other substances while on the medication.
- Ask for written instructions and information about side effects. If your pharmacy doesn't automatically provide this information, be sure and ask for it. Keep track of any side effects you do experience, and report them to the doctor.
- Take all medicine as prescribed. Don't stop taking it once you start feeling better.
- Don't take more or less than the recommended dosage without consulting your doctor or pharmacist.
- Bring all of your medications to an office visit at least once per year. Include prescriptions, over-the-counter products, herbal products and street drugs.

***This is the ninth article in a series on health-related issues. By being an informed health-care consumer, OU employees can help contain and reduce benefit costs to the university.***

### SUMMARY

Patients play an important role in ensuring they get the best health care possible. It's up to them to ask questions when they go to their doctor's office. When physicians write prescriptions, patients should make sure they understand what the medicine is for and how to take it.

Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Wednesday, January 14, 2004  
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Wednesday, January 14, 2004  
Article Start Date: Thursday, January 15, 2004

