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Office of the Surgeon General
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Washington, DC 20201.

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Poor adherence to medication therapy is widely recognized as a barrier to achieving better outcomes for patients. As many as half of all patients do not adhere faithfully to their prescription-medication regimens with a result of more than \$100 billion spent each year on avoidable hospitalizations.¹

Extensive research has been done on the causes of medication nonadherence. One area researched significantly in recently years is how out-of-pocket costs for medication affects adherence. Patients use more medications when the price or the copayments for the medications are lower. However, even if drugs were free, nonadherence would persist. One recent study showed that even among patients who have health plans with no cost sharing for medications, rates of nonadherence were nearly 40%.²

Numerous factors affect adherence at the individual level, including lifestyle, psychological issues, health literacy, support systems, and side effects of medications. Indeed, patients' personal attributes probably have the strongest influence on adherence.³ Numerous interventions have been tested over the years, and some work for some patients. As the Office of the Surgeon General gathers information on medication adherence many solutions will be proposed. A Cochrane literature review identified that promising interventions to improve adherence included self-monitoring and self-management, simplified dosing and interventions directly involving pharmacists. Other strategies showed potential but their effects were less consistent. No interventions were effective to improve all medicines use outcomes across all diseases, populations or settings.⁴ In conclusion, no one type of intervention will address the needs of all patients or all causes of medication nonadherence. The Academy of Managed Care believes that addressing the issue of medication adherence will require focused effort from all health care practioners that interact with patients and the medication management process.

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As we continue to focus on medication adherence, it is also important that equal attention be focused on appropriate medication use. Adherence to inappropriate medications does not lead to optimal health outcomes. Pharmacists are uniquely positioned in the health care system to help optimize appropriate medication use, reduce medication related problems and improve health outcomes. As a clinical expert working as part of an interdisciplinary team, pharmacists can assess whether medication use is contributing to unwanted effects and can help achieve desired outcome from medication use through appropriate use and adherence techniques.⁵

Sincerely,



Edith A. Rosato, R.Ph, IOM
Chief Executive Officer

¹ Osterberg L, Blaschke T. Adherence to medication. *N Engl J Med* 2005;353:487-497

² Doshi JA, Zhu J, Lee BY, Kimmel S, Volpp KG. Impact of a prescription copayment increase on lipid-lowering medication adherence in veterans. *Circulation* 2009;119:390-397

³ Cutler D, Everett W. Thinking outside the pillbox — medication adherence as a priority for health care reform. *N Engl J Med* 2010; 362:1553-1555

⁴ Ryan R, Santesso N, Hill S, Lowe D, Kaufman C, Grimshaw J. Strategies to improve safe and effective medicines use by consumers: an overview of systematic reviews. Published online February 15, 2012. Cochrane Summaries. <http://summaries.cochrane.org/CD007768/strategies-to-improve-safe-and-effective-medicines-use-by-consumers-an-overview-of-systematic-reviews> (accessed May 4, 2012).

⁵ Cipolle R, Strand L, Morley P, *Pharmaceutical Care Practice: The Patient Centered Approach to Medication Management*. 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, Medical Publishing Division, 2012.