Participant satisfaction with a community-based medication synchronization program

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Abstract

Objective: To assess participant satisfaction with a community pharmacy–based medication synchronization program.

Setting: A single location of a grocery store pharmacy chain in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Practice description: A medication synchronization program, Time My Meds (TMM), was implemented in 1 of 20 community pharmacies within the grocery store chain.

Practice innovation: Current pharmacy patients taking three or more chronic medications were recruited to enroll in the medication synchronization program. After at least 3 months of enrollment in TMM, participants were invited to complete a paper survey to assess satisfaction with the program.

Evaluation: Data were collected on overall participant satisfaction with the TMM program. A 10-statement survey gathered demographic information and assessed participant satisfaction using a 5-point Likert scale (1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree).

Results: Data collected from 48 surveys were analyzed. No statistical differences in participant satisfaction were found when considering age, education, income, number of medications at pick-up, or number of monthly trips to the pharmacy prior to program enrollment. Median scores for individual survey items were all 5 out of 5 (strongly agree) using a 5-point Likert scale.

Conclusion: Participants were highly satisfied with the medication synchronization program. These results, if expanded to a wider population, might provide valuable information for continued justification and implementation of this type of service in community pharmacies.

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Approximately three out of four Americans report not always taking their medication(s) as prescribed, and the average adherence rate for individuals on long-term medication therapy is 50%.[1–3] Low adherence for individuals on chronic medications can decrease quality of life, negate the effectiveness of treatment, and increase overall medical costs.[3] Decreased medication adherence accounts for 33% to 69% of medication-related hospital admissions, resulting in approximately $100 billion in annual U.S. expenditures.[4]

Multiple methods have been developed over time to encourage medication adherence, starting with such patient aids as pillboxes and alarm clocks and progressing to the more active involvement of pharmacists. One relatively new method for improving adherence in the community pharmacy setting is use of medication synchronization programs.[5] These programs schedule all of a patient's chronic medications to be filled at the same time, requiring only a single trip to the pharmacy each month.

One study showed that patients on chronic medications enrolled in a medication synchronization program had 3.4 to 6.1 times greater odds of adherence compared with unenrolled patients.[5] Medication synchronization programs may also help improve patient care by modifying pharmacy workflow to determine a single pick-up date rather than filling patient prescription requests at multiple intervals or on an unplanned basis. In addition, use of an appointment-based model allows pharmacy staff to be more proactive with periodic medication profile reviews. Such adjustments help create more time for pharmacists to make clinical interventions, provide full medication reviews each month, and reinforce medication adherence behaviors.[6,7]

Released to market in August 2012, the Time My Meds (TMM) synchronization solution (Ateb, Inc., Raleigh, NC) is a Web-based platform that allows chronic medications to be automatically refilled on a 30-, 60-, or 90-day cycle. Patients participating in the TMM program begin by collaborating with their pharmacist to select the medications to be synchronized for prescription pick-up on a day of the month that works best for them. Some medications require partial fills to have them sync on the planned date, referred to as the synchronization date; therefore, pharmacist involvement in selecting the synchronization date may help minimize the cost of partially filling selected medications.

The pharmacist then establishes the quantity of medication to be dispensed (e.g., 30-, 60-, or 90-day supply) based on patient preference or third-party requirements. As the synchronization date approaches, the patient receives a series of automated phone calls. The first call occurs before the patient's synchronization date and asks whether any medication changes have occurred during the past cycle. If the patient answers "yes," TMM notifies the pharmacy to personally contact the patient for clarification. A second call notifies the patient that his or her medications are ready for pick-up. If the prescriptions are not picked up, a third call informs the patient that the medications are past due for pick-up.[6]

Medication synchronization programs are particularly important in relation to the star ratings system developed by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services for Medicare Advantage and Medicare Part D plans.[8] Those plans with higher star ratings are rewarded with monetary and member enrollment incentives, while plans with lower star ratings are penalized.[8–10] The star ratings include several medication-related measures, three of which are correlated to adherence.[8,9] Adherence measures are triple weighted in the rating algorithm, making these items a key area of focus for pharmacists.[10] Use of a medication synchronization program provides pharmacies and pharmacists with a value-added tool to address patient adherence, help provide patient care, and potentially improve star ratings.

Patient satisfaction with various pharmacy programs and services has been evaluated in prior studies; however, limited real-world examples have been published on patient satisfaction with a medication synchronization program, particularly within a chain grocery store pharmacy.[7,11,12] Evaluating patient satisfaction with medication synchronization programs may provide valuable information regarding continuous improvement and long-term sustainability of such programs.[12]

Key Points

Background:

- Average adherence to chronic medications continues to be low (~50%) in the United States.
- Methods to improve medication adherence include but are not limited to reminder phone calls, pillboxes, automatic monthly refills, and—more recently—medication synchronization programs.
- While patient satisfaction with pharmacy services has previously been studied, limited data are available describing patient satisfaction with medication synchronization programs in a grocery store chain community pharmacy.

Findings:

- Overall, enrolled participants reported high satisfaction with the medication synchronization program.
- Participant comments indicated that the medication synchronization program was convenient and that it increased accountability for medication management.