



# Medication Adherence Practice Module November 2019

*Improving Hypertension and Diabetes Care  
& Prevention Project*



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# Purpose of Module

This module contains a high-level overview of evidence-based information related to medication management and adherence. It is designed to promote and supplement your current quality improvement efforts.

Sections are highlighted by the acronym “**MEDS**”:

- **M**edication Adherence Strategies: What Can We Do?
- **E**ngaging a Pharmacist as Part of the Care Team
- **D**elivering Effective Communication
- **S**upport for Providers & Patients: Using the Tools at Hand

***Please Note: Guidelines and recommendations referenced in this module are to be used along with physician/clinician judgment and treatment and based on individual patient’s unique needs and circumstances.***

## Introduction

**75% of Americans have trouble taking their medications as directed.<sup>1</sup>**

Taking medication correctly may seem like a basic component of the treatment process, but nonadherence (or not taking medication as directed) is a problem of international importance that impacts all diagnostic and demographic groups. Research across 40 years has documented that adherence to prescription medications, regardless of diagnosis, is poor.<sup>2</sup>

Medication adherence can be defined as the extent to which a patient’s behavior corresponds with the prescribed medication dosing regimen, including time, dosing and interval of medication intake.<sup>3</sup> As medical communities work to promote healthy lifestyles and prevent poor health outcomes, it is of primary importance that patients take their medications as directed—especially when they have multiple chronic conditions and must manage a number of different medications to help them stay as healthy as possible.

Medication adherence can be defined as the extent to which a patient’s behavior corresponds with the prescribed medication dosing regimen, including time, dosing and interval of medication intake.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3234383/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ehdc.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/Adherence%20Estimator%20Article\\_McHorney.pdf](https://www.ehdc.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/Adherence%20Estimator%20Article_McHorney.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://systematicreviewsjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13643-019-1014-8>

Healthcare communities and patients, working together as a team, can address this serious public health issue. Learn more about the current state of medication adherence in the United States by viewing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) 2017 Public Health Grand Rounds presentation, [Overcoming Barriers to Medication Adherence for Chronic Diseases](#).<sup>4</sup>

## Medication Adherence Strategies: What Can We Do?

In today's rapidly changing healthcare environment, medical providers and staff have an increasing amount of information to take in, disseminate, document, and track. In light of your growing to-do list, Quality Insights has compiled a number of documented medication adherence strategies to help you streamline the care you provide and increase adherence.

**Short on time to review these resources? Contact your Quality Insights Practice Transformation Specialist to help you quickly decide which options are best for your setting.**



### The Adherence Estimator®

The [Adherence Estimator](#)<sup>5</sup> is a patient-centered resource designed to help you gauge a patients' likelihood of adhering to newly prescribed oral medication for certain chronic, asymptomatic conditions.

Patients respond to three quick statements that provide a score (high, medium or low) indicating the probability of medication nonadherence to a newly prescribed oral medication for certain chronic asymptomatic conditions.

**Incorporate this tool into your workflow in one or more of the following ways:**

- Quickly assess adherence at determined intervals by utilizing the [online assessment link](#)<sup>6</sup> during medication reconciliation and enter results in a structured data field.
- [Print a copy](#)<sup>7</sup> of the Adherence Estimator® for patients to complete in the waiting room or during their office visit. Document results and scan the form to the patient record.
- Learn more about the validity of this tool by reviewing this 2009 study titled, [The Adherence Estimator: a brief, proximal screener for patient propensity to adhere to prescription medications for chronic disease](#).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/grand-rounds/pp/2017/20170221-medication-adherence.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.adherenceestimator.com/default.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.adherenceestimator.com/default.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> <https://tuftshealthplan.com/getattachment/fbf32649-2bc2-4f3d-a79d-a26bdce92a0a/New-Prescription-Survey.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.ehdc.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/Adherence%20Estimator%20Article\\_McHorney.pdf](https://www.ehdc.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/Adherence%20Estimator%20Article_McHorney.pdf)

## Million Hearts® Medication Adherence Tools & Tip Sheets

Get proven strategies and printable guides to help your patients understand the importance of taking their medications as directed from [Million Hearts®](https://millionhearts.hhs.gov)<sup>9</sup>. Featured resources include:

- Medication Adherence Video: Tips for Taking Blood Pressure Medicines as Directed (available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#))
- [Improving Medication Adherence for Patients with Hypertension: A Tip Sheet for Healthcare Professionals](#)
- [Patient Visit Checklist: Supporting Your Patients with High Blood Pressure](#)



## Medication Adherence Action Toolkit

Developed and implemented by the New York City (NYC) Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), with help from the Fund for Public Health in New York (FPHNY), the [Medication Adherence Action Toolkit](#)<sup>10</sup> provides simple clinical tools responding to the needs of clinicians and pharmacists working in busy primary care practices serving patient populations affected by multiple chronic diseases. Highlighted resources include:

- [My Health Goals Self-Management Worksheet](#)
- [Improve Medication Management with Electronic Health Records](#)
- [Fact Sheet: Medicine: Myths vs. Facts](#)

## Engaging a Pharmacist as Part of the Care Team



### Utilizing a Pharmacist

New collaborative care models identify pharmacists as valuable contributors to the health care team.

Incorporating pharmacists in team-based care models increases patient awareness of the importance of medication adherence and further encourages and supports behavior change and self-management of many chronic illnesses and diseases.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> <https://millionhearts.hhs.gov/tools-protocols/medication-adherence.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/providers/resources/public-health-action-kits-medication-adherence.page>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/programs/spha/docs/pharmacist\\_guide.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/programs/spha/docs/pharmacist_guide.pdf)

Here are three ways pharmacists can add value to your patients and practice:

### 1. Medication Therapy Management (MTM)

The American Pharmacists Association describes MTM as a broad range of health care services provided by pharmacists.<sup>12</sup> A pharmacist may provide MTM services in all care settings (e.g., pharmacies, health care clinics, community settings) and seek to ensure that the medication is optimal for the patient and that the best possible outcomes from treatment are achieved.

Pharmacists use MTM to help patients get the best benefits from their medications by working with patients to actively manage drug therapies and by identifying, preventing, and resolving medication-related problems.

### 2. Team-Based Care

Because they often work in the local community, pharmacists extend the health care team from the health care setting into the community. Consequently, pharmacists are some of the most accessible health care professionals. Research shows real value in pharmacists' management of diabetes and heart disease.

Engaging pharmacists as members of the health care team can result in significant improvements in the treatment of diabetes, better control of high blood pressure, improved management of cholesterol, and reduced overall health care costs.<sup>13</sup>



### 3. Working Together to Provide Optimal Patient Care

Interested in learning more about ways you can work together with a pharmacist to improve patient medication adherence outcomes? Consider contacting a pharmacist near you to learn about the services they offer or visit the [Pennsylvania Pharmacist Association website](https://www.papharmacists.com/page/Toolkitshome)<sup>14</sup> to learn more about collaboration and access patient care toolkits.

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/pdfs/programs/stateandlocal/emerging\\_practices-work\\_with\\_pharmacists.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/pdfs/programs/stateandlocal/emerging_practices-work_with_pharmacists.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.accp.com/docs/positions/misc/Improving\\_Patient\\_and\\_Health\\_System\\_Outcomes.pdf](https://www.accp.com/docs/positions/misc/Improving_Patient_and_Health_System_Outcomes.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.papharmacists.com/page/Toolkitshome>



## Delivering Effective Communication



### Six Simple Ways to Improve Medication Adherence

Patients' perceptions of the quality of the healthcare they receive is highly dependent on the quality of their interactions with their healthcare clinician and team. The connection that a patient feels with his/her clinician can ultimately improve their health, mediated through participation in their care, adherence to treatment and patient self-management.<sup>15</sup>

A 2016 article<sup>16</sup> featured on the American Academy of Family Practice website outlines the lessons a Vermont-based practice learned in their journey to improve medication adherence with their patients:

1. **Be aware of the tendency to use medical jargon.** Instead of saying, "This will treat your hypertension," say, "Let's try this for your high blood pressure."
2. **Don't judge.** Instead of saying, "Why aren't you taking your metformin?" say, "I'm curious to know what happens when you take your metformin."
3. **Be aware of costs.** Most patients are hesitant to say they can't afford a medication, so ask the patient to get back to you if the copayment or cost is too high.
4. **Look for underlying conditions.** For example, patients who are depressed rarely take their medications, so consider treating the depression first.
5. **Be clear about the benefit of the medicine.** For example, you might say, "If you take your diabetes medicines and control your blood sugar, you may not need to have your eyeglass prescription changed as often."
6. **Move your patients' prescriptions to mail order if possible.** Going to the pharmacy is often an obstacle.

Explore more opportunities to improve medication adherence by visiting the [Talk Before You Take](#) website, an initiative of the [BeMedWise Program at NeedyMeds](#).<sup>17</sup> This site provides free, downloadable education tools in English and Spanish designed to promote effective patient-provider communication.

### The Value of Assessing Health Literacy

Assessing a patient's health literacy, defined as the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions, can be a vital first step in gauging what type of communication will best meet the needs of the patient. Miscommunication can occur even with the best intentions. For example, health care professionals may believe they're thoroughly communicating information to their

<sup>15</sup> <https://healthcarecomm.org/about-us/impact-of-communication-in-healthcare/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.aafp.org/fpm/2016/0900/p52.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://bemedwise.org/>

patients, and patients may believe they understand the information being provided or may feel embarrassed to speak-up and ask questions.

Health literacy is important and there are many ways we can get involved in making health information accessible and comprehensive for everyone.<sup>18</sup>

**Take action by reviewing the following resources and consider how they align with your current practice:**

- National Network of Libraries of Medicine’s (NNLM) recording, “[Effective Health Communication and Health Literacy on YouTube](#)”<sup>19</sup>
- [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality \(AHRQ\) Health Literacy Library](#)<sup>20</sup>: Created to help healthcare professionals and delivery organizations make information easier to understand and systems easier to navigate.
- [CDC Train Online Course: Culture & Health Literacy: Beyond Access](#)<sup>21</sup>: Discusses how inequalities in health information contribute to unequal treatment and health outcomes for some populations (health disparities) and what communities can do to close the gap and improve health literacy.

## Text Messaging for Increased Patient Engagement

Do you ever get the feeling that patients are ignoring your phone calls? If so, you’re not alone! While phone communication may have been the best option in the past, most patients ignore 90% of the phone calls they receive.<sup>22</sup> Practices may leave voice messages if they can’t reach the patient by phone, but oftentimes these messages also go unnoticed or unheard.



Utilizing a texting solution can be a convenient solution for healthcare practices and patients alike. Systems can be integrated with the existing patient management system, to make it conducive for providers to keep a record of text messages sent and received with the patient’s other medical records. They can also be managed from the practice’s desktop computer, making it easy for office staff to see when a text has been received, and respond quickly.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.ihs.gov/newsroom/ihs-blog/october2019/health-literacy-educating-individuals-families-and-communities/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbGxKnUEY6g&feature=youtu.be>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.ahrq.gov/topics/health-literacy.html>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.train.org/cdctrain/course/1014435/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.solutionreach.com/blog/connect-with-your-patients-through-two-way-texting>



## Review these resources for more information:

- [13 Stats on Why Text Messaging Should be Next for Your Practice<sup>23</sup>](#)
- Patients can start receiving medication reminder text messages immediately by utilizing the [Pledge to Take Your Meds Medication Reminder<sup>24</sup>](#) feature.
- [Click here<sup>25</sup>](#) to learn more about how one text messaging system, called BP MED, has been used to improve the quality of medication management through increasing medication adherence in African Americans with uncontrolled hypertension.

# Support for Patients & Providers: Using the Tools at Hand

## Patient Resources

### Phone Apps to Improve Medication Adherence

Most patients today have easy access to a smartphone—why not encourage them to use a free medication tracking app to help them manage their medicines at home? The options below are provided for informational purposes only and do not imply endorsement by Quality Insights.



- [Quality Insights' Free Apps to Help You Better Manage Your Medicines<sup>26</sup>](#)
- [5 Apps that Improve Medication Adherence<sup>27</sup>](#)
- [MyMedSchedule Plus<sup>28</sup>](#)

### Medication Cost Reduction Resources

If your patients experience financial challenges affording their medications, consider the following options:

- Coupons for medications
- Increasing the prescription to a 90-day supply instead of 30-day supply, to reduce co-pays
- Checking their insurance plan to see if a mail-order service is covered to prevent trips to the pharmacy (if costly transportation is part of the issue)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.solutionreach.com/slideshows/13-stats-on-why-text-should-be-next-for-your-practice?hsCtaTracking=fe478f3d-3511-431d-9fe6-2f6ba4c57c02%7C9cb0cc89-248f-4d60-88ae-df5c1049f768>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.scriptyourfuture.org/get-medicine-reminder/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.researchprotocols.org/2015/1/e1/>

<sup>26</sup> <http://hit.qualityinsights.org/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=7c4887d2-247e-41eb-ac13-767ae5adf65c>

<sup>27</sup> <https://blog.evisit.com/top-apps-improve-medication-adherence>

<sup>28</sup> <https://medactionplan.com/mymedschedule/>

- Suggesting other cost-reduction resources, such as:
  - [Benefits Checkup](#)
  - [Eldercare Locator](#)
  - [United Way 2-1-1](#)
  - [HealthWell Foundation](#)
  - [Needy Meds](#)
  - [Partnership for Prescription Assistance: Medicine Assistance Tool](#)
  - [Family Caregiver Alliance](#) (support and resources for family caregivers of adults):
  - [Aunt Bertha](#)

### Script Your Future: Pledge to Take Your Meds

Led by the National Consumers League, [Script Your Future](#)<sup>29</sup> is a national initiative to raise awareness about medication adherence, which includes the patient campaign known as “Pledge to Take Your Meds.” In partnership with over 130 public and private stakeholder organizations, the campaign offers adherence resources to help patients and the health care professionals who care for them.

Patients can participate in the campaign for free by [visiting the website](#)<sup>30</sup>, where they will find easy-to-understand medication adherence resources, including a medication [wallet card](#) (available in multiple languages), signing up for [medication text alerts](#) and creating their own [personal pledge](#) to take their medications.

### BeMedWise Program at NeedyMeds: Free Printable Resources

BeMedWise Program at NeedyMeds, formerly the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE), encourages healthcare professionals and community groups to foster patient–professional communication about medicines. Visit their extensive [patient resource library](#)<sup>31</sup> to access relevant patient medication adherence resources, including:

- [Your Medicine. Be Smart. Be Safe.](#)
- [Must Ask Questions: What You Need to Ask Your Healthcare Provider and Pharmacist about Your Medications](#)
- [Do’s and Don’ts of Medicine Disposal](#)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.scriptyourfuture.org/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.scriptyourfuture.org/get-campaign-materials/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://bemedwise.org/health-education-resources/medication-information-library>

## Provider Resources

### Podcast: 2018 AMA Doc Talk Episode: Building Trust to Support Medication Adherence

In this October 2018 American Medical Association (AMA) Doc Talk podcast, Marie T. Brown, MD, discusses how to create connections with patients to support medication adherence. [Listen to the recording here.](#)<sup>32</sup>



### CME Webinar: AMA STEPS Forward: Medication Adherence

Learning objectives for this module include defining medication adherence and its importance for patient health, recognizing the importance of developing a routine process for inquiring about medication adherence, identifying top reasons for patients' intentional nonadherence to medications, and explaining the importance of a personalized approach to medication adherence and patient involvement in treatment plans. The AMA designates this enduring material activity for a maximum of .50 AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™. [Access the module here.](#)<sup>33</sup>

### Webinar: The Top 5 Barriers to Medication Adherence

In this webinar, Jenny Glennon, PharmD, RPh, will discuss the top struggles with medication adherence in populations and how to use predictive analytics, tailored outreach, patient engagement, and behavior change programs to overcome them. [Listen to the recording here.](#)<sup>34</sup>

### Webinar: Helping to Improve Medication Adherence: Communication Strategies

Even in a time-sensitive environment, it's still possible to connect with your patients and help improve their medication adherence. [Listen to the recording or download the transcript here.](#)<sup>35</sup>

### Webinar: Working with Pharmacists to Increase Medication Therapy Management

This webinar discusses ways to bring physicians, pharmacists, social workers, and public health together to inform, discuss and encourage use of pharmacists in the team-based medication management therapy model and work to identify innovative reimbursement methods. [Listen to the recording here.](#)<sup>36</sup>

### Webinar: ADA Diabetes Insight: Medication Adherence

Patients with type 2 diabetes may have complex medication regimens or adverse experiences with medication, which may present barriers to adherence. Learn how healthcare providers can consider patient capacity, goals for health care and current lifestyle when developing self-management regimens and prescribing medications. [Listen to the recording here after registration.](#)<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> <http://movingmedicine.libsyn.com/steps-forward-medication-adherence-with-marie-t-brown-md>

<sup>33</sup> <https://edhub.ama-assn.org/steps-forward/module/2702595%20-%20section-225062620>

<sup>34</sup> <https://insights.healthdialog.com/medication-adherence/the-top-5-barriers-to-medication-adherence>

<sup>35</sup> <https://reachmd.com/programs/medical-industry-feature/keys-to-helping-improve-medication-adherence-communication-strategies/10641/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.nationalforum.org/collaborations/million-hearts/learning-session-1/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://professional.diabetes.org/podcast/di080801-medication-adherence>



## Want to Improve Patient Medication Adherence Rates? Modifying Your Workflows Could be the Solution

Quality Insights has developed a list of workflow modifications your practice can use to improve medication adherence, particularly among those managing chronic conditions such as hypertension, diabetes and hypercholesterolemia.

As an active participant in the Live Healthy project, Quality Insights is requesting that your practice **implement ONE workflow improvement related to medication adherence**. Our team is available to support your workflow modification efforts – **at no cost to your practice** – so please contact your local Practice Transformation Specialist if any of the options below are of interest to your practice.

### Office Workflow Modifications

- Urge patients to make a medication adherence pledge. Print out the [pledge form](#) and aid patients in designing their own pledge reason(s).
- Utilize the [Medication Adherence survey](#) with your patients OR have patients complete the [paper survey](#) and go over the results with them while they are still at the office after their appointment.
- Engage patients with a medication reminder wallet size card. Print the [card](#) and give it to patients.
- Encourage patients to adhere to medications through improved communication practices. Download and distribute AHRQ's [Be More Involved in Your Healthcare Tip Brochure](#).
- Develop a [protocol for staff](#) to ask and document patient medication adherence during every visit.
- Provide patients with an updated medication list and instructions after every visit. Verbally discuss any new changes in medications or regimens.
- Establish a protocol for following up with patients who receive new prescriptions or have medication changes in a timely manner.