



Medication Adherence

The World Health Organization defines adherence as “the extent to which a person’s behavior — taking medications, following a diet, and/or executing lifestyle changes corresponds with agreed recommendations from a health care provider.”¹ It implies a collaborative decision between the patient and the healthcare provider. An agreement on a therapeutic regimen fosters patient ownership, responsibility, and empowerment.

“Drugs don’t work in patients who don’t take them” is a well-known quote from a former U.S. Surgeon General, C. Everett Koop. The impact of medication non-adherence can include treatment failure, unnecessary treatment, disease exacerbation, increased utilization, patient and physician frustration and death.

Incidence of non-adherence:

- 50% of patients with chronic disease do not take their medications as prescribed.²
- Non-adherence accounts for 30-50% of treatment failures.³
- 1 of 3 patients fail to fill their prescription.⁴
- One-third to 2/3 of all medication related hospitalizations in the U.S. are the result of poor medication adherence.²
- Cost of non-adherence in the U.S. exceeds \$100 billion annually.²

Five Dimensions of Adherence¹:

Consider the following five dimensions of adherence as potential causes or predictors of poor medication adherence. It is important to understand why a patient may not take their medication in order to effectively collaborate and communicate with the patient to successfully overcome barriers. A patient can fall into more than one of these categories at any given time.

Dimension of Adherence	Factors Affecting Adherence
Social/economic	Financial stress (cost of medication, copayment, or both), low “health” literacy, lack of family support, lack of transportation, cultural beliefs
Health system and health care team factors	Inadequate follow-up or discharge planning, poor provider-patient relationship, lack of positive reinforcement, lack of continuity of care
Condition-related	Treatment of asymptomatic disease, chronic conditions, inadequate understanding of the disease
Therapy-related	Complex regimen, side effects, frequent changes of medication regimen, long duration of treatment, lifestyle burden
Patient-related	Knowledge, resources, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations



An Anthem Company