

Are You Using Your Medicines Correctly and Safely?

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The Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act of 2003 (MMA) provides prescription drug benefits for Medicare beneficiaries under Part D. The MMA also directs pharmacists to use medication therapy management (MTM) to improve medicine use by patients who have more than one health condition and who use a number of Part D-covered medicines costing at least \$4,000 a year. Each prescription drug plan (PDP) or Medicare Advantage prescription drug plan (MA-PDP) must have an MTM program. However, these programs can vary widely in scope and structure, for example, from mailed information to face-to-face MTM counseling with a pharmacist. Also, the MTM rules do not affect patients who do not use their medicines correctly or those who may need only low-cost medicines but may still be at risk for other medical problems due to their diseases.

A recent national survey of MTMs showed that only 20 percent of MTM programs offered face-to-face MTM. A survey by the New Mexico Prescription Improvement Coalition (NMPIC) showed similar results. Many studies have shown that using MTM services results in patients taking their medicines correctly and managing their medical conditions better. These studies also show that outcomes improve with the more time pharmacists are able to spend with patients.

NMPIC is launching a project, the New Mexico Medication Therapy Management (MTM) Collaborative, to study the value of MTM using motivational interviewing (a patient-centered counseling style that helps change behavior by exploring and resolving mixed feelings), education and self-management. Local pharmacists will teach both patients and providers to improve blood glucose (sugar) control and self-management in patients with diabetes, blood pressure in patients with hypertension (high blood pressure), LDL (“bad”) cholesterol levels in patients with hyperlipidemia (high lipids, or fats in the bloodstream, which can speed hardening of the arteries), and managing heart failure. This study will involve up to 600 New Mexico Medicare beneficiaries for one year who:

- Have at least two of these diseases: diabetes, hypertension, hyperlipidemia and heart failure
- Have remained a member of a participating Medicare PDP or MA-PDP (Lovelace, Presbyterian or MemberHealth) during 2007 and 2008
- Live in New Mexico

People on both Medicare and Medicaid or who have had MTM services in the past do not qualify for this study.

All patients who qualify for MTM services will be sent information on MTM by their PDPs or MA-PDPs and be invited to join the study. Patients in the study will be put into one of two groups:

1. The usual MTM group (control group) will have two 15-minute visits with a pharmacist, one at the beginning and one at the end of study.

2. The face-to-face MTM group will have a one-hour, in-person visit with a pharmacist, up to four 30-minute visits, and up to eight phone calls with the pharmacist, depending on patient need during the study.

For both groups, during these visits the pharmacist will check vital signs and ask for consent to obtain lab results from the patient's primary care provider (PCP). Patients will also complete surveys to measure their quality of life, knowledge of health issues and opinions of MTM services.

Study leaders hope to show that MTM can improve the health of patients through higher quality of life, fewer problems caused by their disease, and lower health care costs. Also, results of this study may be used to urge the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to include face-to-face MTM services by pharmacists in the Medicare benefit.

A total of 37 pharmacists in New Mexico, from towns including Las Cruces, Alamogordo, Truth or Consequences, Roswell, Artesia, Clovis and Ruidoso, have joined the study to provide face-to-face MTM and disease management education to their patients.

If you would like more information on or you would like to join the New Mexico Medication Therapy Management Collaborative, please call the New Mexico Medical Review Association (NMMRA) at (505) 998-9769.

NMMRA sponsors the New Mexico Prescription Improvement Coalition and the New Mexico Medication Therapy Management Collaborative. NMMRA is a not-for-profit, physician-sponsored organization and is New Mexico's federally contracted Medicare Quality Improvement Organization and Medicaid External Quality Review Organization. NMMRA works with health care providers, consumer and health care organizations, and state and federal agencies to improve the quality of health care in New Mexico.

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