

Embargoed until 00.01 (BST) Thursday 16 April 2015
Up to half of chronic disease patients not taking medicines as prescribed

A report of a meeting by the Academy of Medical Sciences and the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine highlights the lack of patient adherence to medicines and identifies strategies to alleviate the problem.

Non-adherence to medicine is a serious issue. It is estimated that between 30 and 50% of patients taking medicines for chronic conditions do not take their medicines as prescribed.

Wasted medicines are thought to cost the NHS in England around £300 million per year, which does not take into account the additional costs of avoidable illness, further treatments and hospital admissions.

Sir Alasdair Breckenridge CBE FRSE FMedSci, Chair of the meeting, said:
“The fact that only one third to one half of patients take their medicines as prescribed should be a major wake up call to the healthcare profession. We need to determine why this is the case and develop better ways to help people take the medicines they are offered.”

The report stresses that this problem lies with the wider healthcare community as well as with patients themselves, and a co-ordinated response is needed to ensure the best outcomes.

It suggests improving communication between healthcare professionals and patients could be a key strategy to enhance adherence, increasing patients' participation in the decision-making process during treatment, and developing a deeper understanding of their experiences and expectations.

A recent analysis by University College London of 94 studies involving over 25,000 patients showed that a patient's decision to take a medicine is often a balance between their perceptions of personal need for the medicine, and concerns about potential adverse consequences of taking it.

The report also recognises that digital technology has the potential to transform healthcare. There are various technologies currently available that could help improve adherence. Alerts, automated pill boxes and apps are just some of the emerging options now on offer.

Trials have demonstrated that text messages sent to remind patients to take their medicines can improve adherence. Other technologies offer the possibility of monitoring adherence such as micro-chipped pill containers or pre-loaded blister packs programmed to dispense the correct medication at the correct times.

Sir Alasdair added: "Digital technology has the potential to transform healthcare, and we must ensure that patients are involved in every step of the journey. Technology could be the 'blockbuster drug of the 21st century', but we must monitor its value now in order to fully reap the rewards in the future."

The report is the result of a meeting, held in December 2014, brought together key stakeholders from academia, industry and healthcare services, as well as ethicists, economists and patient representatives, to discuss the issues caused by lack of adherence, and possible strategies to alleviate the problem.

A copy of the report will be available to download from the Academy's website, <http://www.acmedsci.ac.uk/adherence>, from 00.01 BST Thursday 16 April 2015.

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For further information, please contact:

Holly Rogers, Communications Officer, Academy of Medical Sciences
020 3176 2183, holly.rogers@acmedsci.ac.uk

Notes for Editors

Academy of Medical Sciences

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