



Agustina Piñero, MD
agusep@hotmail.com

22 – Do You Forget Your Medication?

Agustina Piñero, MD
Medica de Familia
Centro Medico Met.
Fundación Querer Vivir Mejor,
Qenti Medical.
Docente de Salud Social y
Comunitaria, Facultad de
Medicina Universidad Nacional
de Córdoba. Federación
Argentina de Medicina Familiar y
General.

During the last century, considerable advances have been made in the field of diagnosis and treatments that cure and prevent the progression of many diseases and improves life expectancy. However, we, as health professionals face a lot of challenges, including poor adherence to treatment. The statistics are clear, between one third and one half of the prescribed drugs for long-term treatments are not used as recommended (1).

Definition

Adherence is defined by the World Health Organization as the degree to which the behaviour of a person coincides with the recommendations and prescribed treatment given by a health care provider in terms of medication, diet, and implementation of lifestyle changes (2).

Magnitude of the Problem Analysis

According to the World Health Organization, adherence to long-term treatment for chronic diseases averages 50% in developed countries; in developing countries the rates are even lower. It is undeniable, for many patients it is difficult to follow treatment recommendations. The impact of low adherence grows as the burden of chronic disease increases worldwide.

By 2020, non-communicable diseases, mental disorders, HIV and tuberculosis will exceed 65% worldwide (3). The poor are the most affected.

Clearly we have a problem that manifests itself with poor health outcomes at all scales, from the individual to the global.

Multiple and various factors influence adherence to treatment. Analysing this from a classical perspective, the focus is put on the patient and issues related to them as the cause of bad adherence. This approach leaves out the determinants of health with major impact in adherence, like the health system, professionals and medicines (4).

The interaction of the mentioned aspects, is key in the final result of adherence. Adherence is a multifaceted concept, and responsibility should lie among all the participants, including the health system.

It is evident that the lack of adherence to the recommendations of the health team, whether in terms of diagnostic practices, drug treatment, or recommendations on lifestyle, is a complex problem. Therefore, it is imperative, from a complex perspective, to consider and put into play all possible approaches into analysis.

We must accept and realize that in any medical act, there are two experts. The

professional, with knowledge of pathophysiology, diagnosis, treatment options and prognosis of the disease, and the person converted into patient, an expert in his own body, his dietary habits, his ways of getting sick and getting well. Traditional medicine has lost its credibility among people, as the result of health industry advances, the massive and little critical access to information, but mostly as a consequence of the dehumanization of the physician-patient relationship. This fact has motivated patients to seek the help of alternative medicines. It is important to recover the clinical process centred on the person, in order to advance towards a comprehensive health construction.

To do so, the key is to recognize others with their knowledge and beliefs, to cherish and respect them. From that position of acceptance, we can provide information required to accompany any decision being made, but more important it will be a valuable contribution to adherence to treatment. This approach will ensure satisfaction for everyone involved.

According to our worldview, we, family physicians, are in a privileged place to support our patients, provide information and monitor health decisions. This means understanding that there are no right or wrong decisions, but also the agreement to incorporate the best available evidence and physician experience, taking into account the values and preferences of the patients.

There is no "gold standard" for measuring adherence behaviour. The literature reports the use of a variety of strategies with little success.

Classical literature estimates, adherence to treatment as a binary variable: compliant / non-compliant, adherence / no adherence. Determinants are classified into 4 areas:

1. Doctor-patient relationship
2. The patient and their environment
3. Disease
4. Therapeutic

Medicine is science and art. From this perspective a lot has been done in each query to improve adherence to treatment. To endeavour to build a strong bond and trust is crucial. The personal relationship and accumulated knowledge over time, provide valuable resources to the family doctor to serve as a caregiver and counsellor to patients who in the end, will accept more recommendations.

If we understand the process of adherence, it is possible to improve focusing our care from a patient-centred perspective, considering their beliefs about the health disease process, their expectations and their social and economic context. Once we gain the trust of the patient, we can start analysing what the obstacles are of adherence and from that point, explore together what are the best available alternatives for that particular person and situation.

Take Home Message

- There is no strategy or set of intervention strategies that have proven effective for all patients, conditions and environments. Current methods to improve compliance in chronic health problems are not very effective. There is no "gold standard" to assess adherence. Research to help patient's adherence to treatment should be established as a high priority.
- Interventions to improve adherence should be tailored to the patient, considering particular circumstances and context. Building a relationship based on trust is essential for both parties, patient a professional, to achieve the desired results, in all cases being a source of support, not blaming them. The professionals must consider the adherence and the factors influencing it, in every situation particularly. Adherence as a dynamic process.
- Health professionals should acquire tools to help their patients improve adherence to treatment.
- The context where the patient's life is developing, its family, community and patient organizations are key to improve adherence, especially in chronic conditions.
- Good communication between health team members, patients and families is key to obtain the trust of patients, include them in decision making and ensure adherence to treatment

Original Abstract

<http://www.woncaeurope.org/content/93-do-you-forget-your-medication>

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