

Lower Health Care Costs And Better Health

(NAPSA)—Many companies are finding that the best prescription for improving employee health—and lowering health care costs—is to make it easier for employees to fill their prescriptions.

Not taking prescribed medicine is a serious problem, especially for those with chronic conditions, often resulting in complications, death—and ultimately higher health care costs.

A recent study, published in Health Affairs and funded in part by GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), found that decreasing prescription drug co-payments increases employee use of medications for such chronic conditions as heart disease, diabetes and high cholesterol.

“We must encourage patients to take medications as prescribed for these conditions and encourage employers to support the health management efforts of their workers,” said Dr. Mark Fendrick, one of the study’s authors.

The study measured the rate at which employees took their medicine when one employer’s co-payment rates for generic medications were reduced from \$5 to \$0 and co-payments for branded drugs were cut in half.

A similar employer with identical disease management offerings but stable co-payments served as a control group.

The study found that those in the group with lower co-payments were more likely to take medications for heart disease, diabetes and high cholesterol.

There was also a small positive result for some asthma medications but it was not statistically significant.



Shifting health care costs to employees by raising prescription co-pays may not prove to be a smart economic choice.

Study authors found that this may have something to do with the type of drug and how often it must be taken.

An earlier study found that patients took their medication less often when prescription co-payments increased.

“Now with this study we are able to show that removing economic barriers to medication can positively affect patient behavior,” said Michael C. Sokol, M.D., medical director for GSK’s Health Management Innovations team.

Three out of every \$4 spent on health care in the U.S. goes to treating 45 percent of Americans with at least one chronic disease.

Employer strategies of shifting health care costs to the patient may not be cost effective in the long run because they are only a short-term economic fix.

To lower overall health care costs and to improve the health of patients, the focus should be on treating chronic diseases.