

Trimming Your Prescription Price Tag

(NAPSA)—The National Institute on Health Care Management reports that Americans spent \$175.2 billion on prescription drugs in 2001, with an average cost per prescription of \$49.84, and according to the Medco Health Solutions 2002 Drug Trend report, prescription drug use in some categories has increased 600 percent.

With millions of Americans taking one or more prescriptions, consumers may be searching for a way to cut that cost.

“Cutting the cost of your prescription drugs is not difficult, and results from taking an active role in your treatment,” says Dr. Glenn Stettin, vice president of clinical products for Medco Health Solutions.

Whether it’s families simply looking to save or seniors living on a fixed income, Stettin recommends the following tips for reducing the prescription drug price tag:

- **In generic terms.** Generics are gaining in popularity among physicians and patients alike, due largely to generic health programs like Medco’s Generics First program. Generics contain the same active ingredient as their brand-name counterparts, making them just as safe and effective—plus they can provide as much as 60 percent in savings.

- **The non-drug route.** Lifestyle changes can alleviate symptoms for which prescription drugs are being taken. For example, reducing caffeine, alcohol and chocolate; avoiding tight-fitting clothing; and quitting smoking can help reduce symptoms of heartburn—a free alternative to expensive medications.

- **Understand the plan.** If you have health coverage that includes a drug benefit, understanding how the plan works can save you money. Know what is and isn’t covered, and how your out-of-pocket costs are structured.

- **The condition you’re in.** Some conditions, such as colds and flu, can be treated more effectively with over-the-counter medications than with more expensive prescriptions.

- **Getting off course.** Some prescriptions may include multiple refills for a temporary condition. Having the refills does not necessarily mean you must use



Examining the alternatives is a prescription for saving money on pharmaceuticals.

them.

- **Free-thinking.** If you’re on a fixed income, diagnosed with a new condition or prescribed a new therapy, ask your doctor about samples. Many doctors like to provide patients with drug samples in order to determine if any side effects will be experienced—before the person goes to the expense of filling the prescription.

- **Two for one.** It may be less expensive to take on 20 mg pill than two 10 mg pills for the same effect. Similarly, it may be cheaper to split a 100 mg tablet in two than to buy twice as many 50 mg tablets.

- **Shop around.** The cost of prescription drugs varies from pharmacy to pharmacy. If you have a drug plan, mail order pharmacies, such as Medco Health’s Home Delivery Pharmacy Service may lower your out-of-pocket costs. If you don’t have drug coverage, explore discount buying programs like Medco Health’s YOURxPlan for major savings.

- **Make note.** Consumers should inform their doctor(s) of what their drug coverage includes, and even ask that it be noted in their medical record. This will help doctors appreciate the portion of the prescription cost that the patient will bear directly.

Above all, Dr. Stettin recommends consumers become partners with their doctors in their therapy. “Communication is key,” he says. “By actively researching their conditions, the prescription drugs they take and the alternatives available, consumers will receive better care and could cut their health care costs significantly.”

For more information about the Medco Health savings plans, visit the Web site at www.medcohealth.com.