

Introduction

Patient adherence packaging can significantly improve patient adherence - but ONLY if patients use it correctly. This requires that patients understand the adherence usage instructions and are motivated to follow these instructions. Not only does this require that the patient instructions are easy to understand and follow but that the patient "buys-in" on the personal advantages available with the patient adherence packaging.

<http://www.hcpconline.org/10-tips-for-patient-centric-adherence-packaging.html>
<http://www.hcpconline.org/member-news-document/HPCP-White-Paper-Improving-Medication-Adherence-with-Packaging.pdf>
<http://www.hcpc-europe.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/151127-GLC-PPL-Conference-Vienna-final.pdf>

Tips 1-5

1. Tip #1 Make sure patients understand "how" and "why" patient adherence packaging can help make taking medications easier for them

In spite of all the advances being made in patient adherence packaging, many patients are still not using the packaging correctly. Many patients do not understand the purpose of compliance packaging. Perhaps this could be one of the reasons that they are removing all the medications at once.

Health professionals need to know how to counsel patients when the initial compliance package is dispensed. Patients will be more inclined to use the patient adherence packaging if they understand how the compliance packaging can help them remember to take a medication at the right time and check if they have already taken a dose. This is a major advantage over medications dispensed in a standard prescription vial.

2. Tip #2 Make it easy for patients to understand how to take the "first" dose

If you can step back and try to pretend you are a patient using a compliance package for the first time, it might be easier to understand why so many people are having problems. How would you know how to open the compliance package and remove the dose if you could not understand the instructions on the package? I believe this is a critical problem many patients are currently facing. Instructions must be written in language people can understand. In addition, these instructions need to be available in one place on the package, preferably with the first dose. Sometimes the instructions on how to use the package are separated on both the front and back of the package so the patient has to try to "piece the information together"..

Tips 1-5 (cont)

Sometimes dosage instructions are included at the bottom of the panel because that is where there is available blank space. This may look good from a design layout but it makes it very difficult for patients to understand. When information is split and not near the doses being discussed, it actually can cause confusion and lead to patient non adherence - exactly the opposite goal of patient adherence packaging.

Make it easy for the patient to understand how to take the first dose and keep all the patient information in one place, preferably with the appropriate doses to aid patient comprehension.

3. Tip #3 Use white space so that it maximally impacts patient comprehension.

White space is at a premium due to FDA required information but it can be every effective if used optimally for patient instructions.

Follow patient education guidelines to make sure the message will be understood by patients but also use design techniques that lead the patient through the package and its message so it is maximally effective. In some instances, illustrations may be more effective than the words.

4. Tip #4 Provide patient instructions for use in a logical order

When patient instructions are separated and not in a logical order of use, patient comprehension falls and patient adherence will fall. It is essential that the information provided on how to use the adherence packaging and the medication are clear and in a logical order of use. The package will be even more successful when the ideas are organized in the order that your audience will use them.

For instance, if a dose is titrated or requires special dosage information, place this information next to the specific dose. This will increase patient adherence. Do not place specific dosage information in any area that is blank, just because there happens to be space available. This is currently happening with several patient adherence packages and is confusing patients. Instructions are easier to follow if they are near the dose being discussed and the instructions include logical steps or timing sequence..

5. Tip #5 Make sure the instructions are a Grade 6 reading level

Several healthcare agencies have recommended patient education materials not be higher than a sixth grade level when communicating with the general US population. There are many methods of testing the readability of your patient information including the Flesch/Flesch-Kincaid readability test available in some word processing programs. Make sure patients do not give up because they cannot understand the instructions. All the patient instructions must be clear, understandable and reinforced with appropriate design..

Tips 6-10

Tip #6 Graphic illustrations must be self-explanatory and not contradict written information

A good illustration can be very effective. However, the illustration must not be confusing to patients in any way or this can decrease patient adherence. Always ask "How can this illustration be misinterpreted?" and then keep working on it so that the illustration is completely clear and instructional.

Tip #7 Use a font patients can easily read and colors that increase health literacy

Often the branding colors used as the background are too dark for even a black font to show through. The result is that a patient (even without visual problems) will have problems just reading the information. The reverse is common, too. White wording on a pale color is also difficult to read.

Color is very important and can improve patient recall. Some colors can be motivational and help improve patient adherence. However, some color combinations should not be used for medications to treat certain diseases. For example, patients with diabetes who have undergone laser treatment for retinopathy have difficulty distinguishing between blue and green. If you are developing packaging for a diabetes medication, caution should be used in printing blue and green together on the packaging. Never use yellow on a white background for packaging that will be dispensed to older adults because as a person ages, their vision "yellows" and they will have difficulty distinguishing between yellow and white.. **Tip #8 Reinforce the FDA-approved patient labeling for the medication.**

It is important to use the same patient wording approved by FDA for the patient labeling on the patient adherence packaging. Also reinforce the same administration steps. This will help prevent patient confusion because they are receiving the same wording or "main steps" on the patient adherence package as on the patient labeling. Whenever possible, attach the patient labeling to the patient adherence packaging so that it is readily available to the patient for reference and more information.

Tip #9 The patient adherence packaging should follow the patient adherence strategy developed for the medication, regardless of whether it is a clinical trial or a product launch.

A patient adherence strategy should be developed for every medication before it goes through a clinical trial and before it is launched. The patient adherence strategy will vary with each product. The clinical trial protocol should clarify how many doses of a medication can be missed without a significant clinical effect and this should be tied to the definition of patient adherence for every clinical trial. Patient adherence packaging can be an effective component of this adherence strategy.

Tips 6-10 (cont)

Tip #10 Provide health care professionals with demos they can use in patient counseling.

Pharmacists can be extremely effective partners with patient adherence packagers because they are the last health professional to counsel a patient before the patient assumes full responsibility for the use of the product. Pharmacists need demonstration products they can use so that the patient leaves the pharmacy fully informed on how to remove a dose and how to use the patient adherence packaging optimally.