

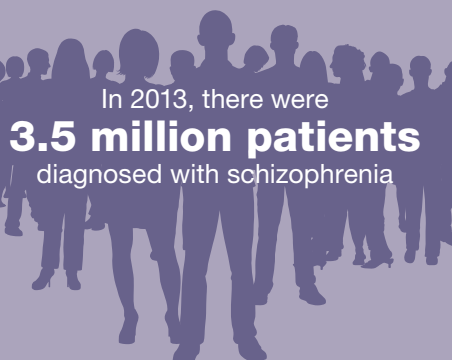


Schizophrenia Relapse Reduction Program



Schizophrenia and the Role of the Pharmacist

This resource is provided for informational purposes only and is not intended as reimbursement or legal advice. You should seek independent, qualified professional advice to ensure that your organization is in compliance with the complex legal and regulatory requirements governing health care services, and that treatment decisions are made consistent with the applicable standards of care.



In 2013, there were
3.5 million patients
diagnosed with schizophrenia

or roughly
1.1%
of the U.S. population.^{3,4}

In 2013, the annual
direct and indirect
costs of schizophrenia
were estimated at
\$155.7 billion.⁵

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a chronic, relapsing, and disabling disorder characterized by symptoms including hallucinations, delusions, disorganized speech, grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior, and diminished emotional expression or avolition.¹ Pharmacists can assist in providing medication-related services to help serve patients with schizophrenia.²

Cognitive deficits in patients with schizophrenia are common and linked to both vocational and functional impairments. These deficits may include decrements in declarative memory, working memory, language function, and slower processing speed.¹ In addition, patients may present with some of the following comorbidities^{1,6}:

- Cardiovascular disease such as hypertension and hyperlipidemia
- Diabetes
- Respiratory disease such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Infectious disease (HIV and hepatitis C) as a result of at-risk behavior
- Other psychiatric disorders including depression, anxiety, and substance use (smoking, alcohol, and other drug use)

Treatment Approaches

Treatment goals for patients with schizophrenia focus on managing symptoms, maintaining or improving level of function and quality of life, and relapse reduction.⁶ Psychological and/or social interventions are complementary treatment options to pharmacotherapy.⁶

Reducing relapse is an important part of treatment because relapses may be associated with:

- Worsening symptoms, such as psychosis, cognitive impairment, or rehospitalization^{7,8}
- Decreased response to treatment, including medication⁹
- Failure to return to prior level of functioning⁷

Along with psychosocial interventions, the basis of treatment for a patient with schizophrenia is antipsychotic medication.⁶ While many patients prefer oral medications, those with recurrent relapses related to partial or full nonadherence are candidates for a long-acting injectable (LAI) antipsychotic medication, as are patients who prefer this mode of administration.⁶



The Role of a Community Mental Health Care Pharmacist

As experts in pharmacotherapy, pharmacists can provide complementary skills, knowledge, and attitudes to other health care professionals within a multidisciplinary team context.²

Pharmacists may contribute to health care teams by²:

- Helping ensure safe and efficacious use of medicines
- Promoting medication adherence
- Detecting and resolving or preventing drug-related problems
- Providing comprehensive drug information to patients and other health care professionals
- Reinforcing primary prevention, health promotion, and lifestyle-modification activities

Additionally, pharmacists may participate in case conferencing interventions. A case conference is a multidisciplinary meeting of 2 or more health professionals to plan care for a specific person with chronic and complex care needs.² In the context of medication management review services, case conferencing provides an opportunity for direct face-to-face dialogue between the treating physician and the reviewing pharmacist.²

An exploratory study investigating the process of decision making in mental health management between pharmacists and physicians during face-to-face meetings found that, although physicians assumed the final decision-making responsibility, they recognized the pharmacists' expertise, especially in relation to improving medication adherence. Physicians also acknowledged that some patients were more willing to share information with pharmacists than with physicians.¹²

Adherence to antipsychotic medications for individuals with schizophrenia is a HEDIS[®] quality measure.¹³

Pharmacists may play a role in helping patients with schizophrenia. In 2014, there were an estimated **25,080** psychiatrists in the United States, while there were an estimated **290,780** pharmacists.^{10,11}

Pharmacists Can Help Patients With Mental Illness

Pharmacists are some of the most patient-accessible health care professionals; therefore, they may be able to help impact patient outcomes.¹⁴ The following is a checklist of potential pharmacist interventions to help patients with mental illness, including schizophrenia.¹⁴

- Stress the importance of medication adherence in managing schizophrenia, and educate on the potential adverse effects of the selected medication
- Recommend various strategies that patients can use to increase adherence to their therapy (using medication reminder devices, using automated refill features to ensure prescriptions are filled on time, using a single pharmacy for all prescriptions)
- Instruct patients to report any side effects to their health care provider(s)
- Discourage patients from discontinuing any of their medications unless directed by a physician
- Encourage patients not to take any other medications, including nonprescription drugs, vitamins, and herbal medications, without first seeking advice from their health care provider(s)
- Encourage patients to maintain routine visits with their health care provider
- Discuss the impact of alcohol and illicit drug use
- Offer smoking-cessation strategies for those patients who smoke
- Show empathy and provide encouragement and support

As a part of an interdisciplinary team, pharmacists play an important role in providing care to patients with mental illness. Their expertise in pharmacotherapy and providing continuity in medication-related services can help serve these patients.

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