



What is Medication Management?

What is Medication Management...and Why is it Important?

Taking the right medication at the right time can often mean the difference between life and death.

Whether using a single medication or several to treat chronic or multiple illnesses, knowing what to take, how to take it, when to take it, and the correct dosage, are all critical to successful medication therapy.

That's where **medication management** enters the healthcare picture.

Medication management is a multi-faceted process of reconciling, monitoring, and assessing the medications an individual takes to assure compliance with a specific medication regimen, while also ensuring the individual avoids potentially dangerous drug interactions and other complications.

There are several elements in the medication management process, and they are all focused on making sure that prescribed medications are taken as intended.

- **Medication reconciliation.** As the central component and key driver of medication management, reconciliation is a comprehensive process that compares an individual's prescribed medication to the medications that s/he has actually been taking. The goal is to **prevent adverse drug events that could result from allergic reactions as well as medication omissions, substitutions, and duplications.** This process occurs at several points in the continuum of care.

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Reconciliation has a twofold purpose: It promotes **medication safety** as well as the individual's **ongoing health**.

Reconciliation should be done whenever new medicines are prescribed or when any other changes in medication are considered.

- **Active monitoring** of all medications an individual currently uses. This includes creating a list of all medicines, the doses, the reason they are being taken, and a recommended schedule of when and how to take them. This ensures that the individual receives the full therapeutic benefit of the medication while minimizing any known side effects. The list is maintained in the individual's healthcare record and a copy is also provided to the individual. It is regularly reviewed to keep it current.
- **Keeping track of how medication is taken.** Medicine is typically taken in set doses at regular intervals. If a dose is missed or taken at the wrong time, serious complications can occur.
 - To help manage a medication regimen, there are devices that will automatically issue reminders to take a dose; medication dispensers/pill cases (daily, weekly, monthly) can be filled and marked to identify when and how the medication is to be taken; and written information is provided on what to do if a dose (or a medicine) is missed.
 - Caregivers can also provide practical help with direct reminders, and reinforce with the individual why and how the medication is to be taken.

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- **Medication safety education.** In addition to reconciling, monitoring, and tracking an individual's medication regimen, **educating individuals (and their family members) about the safe use of medication** is also vital to maintaining health and well-being. When an individual understands how and why they must take a particular medicine, and the physical and financial consequences (e.g., repeated hospitalizations) if not taken *as prescribed*, it is much more likely they will comply with their medication schedule, and be healthier and more comfortable, even with a chronic illness or condition.

The Importance of Medication Management when Changes Occur:

- **Health Status Changes**

Illness or a decline in physical health can often mean a change in the activities of daily living. A new medicine may be prescribed or an existing one changed. Reconciling the schedule of medication an individual is taking is central to supporting the treatment plan.
- **When Care Settings Change**

There are occasions when an individual may need to be hospitalized or admitted to a nursing home or other treatment facility. (Often, but not always, this is because of a change in health status.) This means not only a change in the care setting, but also a change in doctors, a change in the level and type of services received, and likely a change in medications.

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- **From home to hospital.** Being hospitalized is a disruptive and often uncomfortable experience. Daily routines are altered when in the hospital. Add to this a new team of care providers, (doctors, nurses, physical therapists, etc.) and the result can be confusion and disorientation.

Medication may also change dramatically in a hospital. Not only can the medication itself change (or be discontinued), but the dosage, frequency, and reason it is prescribed can also change. This is why medication management while in the hospital is a critical part of care.

- **From the Hospital to a Nursing Home/Rehabilitation Facility**

There are times when leaving the hospital does not mean going directly home. A stay in a nursing or rehabilitation facility may be necessary. When this is the case, medication review and reconciliation is a defined step in both the hospital discharge and the nursing/rehabilitation facility admission processes.

- **From Nursing Home or Rehabilitation Facility to Home**

Review and reconciliation of all prescribed medication is a standard step in the discharge process from a nursing or rehabilitation facility to home, especially when a home care team is working with the individual. This is where the home care nurse becomes a hub of information, support, and continuity for the individual returning home.

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The process is essentially the same when transferring from one healthcare environment to another—one team must talk to the other team and to the individual, their family, and other healthcare providers to be certain that the necessary information is both shared and understood.

- **When Healthcare Providers Change**

The healthcare practitioner is a central part of an individual's healthcare experience. And when that changes, medication management has a major role, too. This means that there must be direct, one-on-one communication between the individual and the new provider(s).

Why is Medication Management in a Home Care Setting Important?

It is understood in healthcare environments that when an individual is taking multiple medications, there is an increased likelihood of duplications, drug interaction, side effects, allergic reactions, contraindications, etc. The risks are the same in a home care setting.

If the home care nurse believes there is a duplication, an omission or a contraindication for certain drugs, it is his/her responsibility to discuss these issues with the doctor(s) who prescribed the medications. The nurse can also assist the individual in contacting their doctor(s) to review and discuss the situation.

When someone returns home from a facility, continuing to take the medication that was prescribed when they were discharged may be crucial to their continued recovery as well as to maintaining their health.

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The home care team needs to know whether or not the individual is receiving the same medication they received in the hospital. Or, was their medication stopped when it shouldn't have been? Did they come home with medication they no longer need? These are just some of the issues medication management in the home addresses.

The Role of the Home Care Nurse and Home Health Aide in Medication Management

When a home care service plan/treatment plan is established for an individual, their medication schedule is an integral part of that plan. The home care nurse and home health aide both play key roles in this effort.

Medication management is about more than just reconciliation—it addresses a number of concerns: What else is the individual taking besides medication? Vitamins? Supplements? Are there any issues with how or when to take the medication, e.g., did the individual forget to take a dose or did they have a difficult time opening a pill bottle?

Along with confirming the actual substances being taken is the need to be sure the right medication is taken at the right time, in the right amount, and in the right order. Therapeutic compliance is very important to the individual's health and to their home care team's ability to provide appropriate care.

The home care nurse will oversee this effort and conduct ongoing assessments to make sure the prescribed medication is being taken as the doctor ordered, and that any vitamins, supplements or other medications are not causing an interaction or are not contraindicated.

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The nurse will work to ensure the following:

- The individual's medication plan complies with the service plan/treatment plan.
- The responsible, prudent supervision of an individual's care, including their medication regimen, is understood and integrated into overall disease management.
- The individual's medication management includes reconciliation, compliance, and ongoing assessment. Practical assistance such as medication set-ups, accessible packaging, pre-assembled doses, automated telephone reminders, and other important safety tips and tools are provided and used as needed.
- Unnecessary (and expensive) trips to the Emergency Room or a hospital readmission are prevented.

The Importance of Communication...for the Individual, their Doctor(s), and their Home Care Provider

Timely, accurate, and ongoing communication to facilitate an individual's home care medication management cannot be over emphasized, especially when industry research tells us that:

- Older people experience adverse events from medications at three times the rate of younger people.

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- While older people make up approximately 13% of the population, they account for more than 50% of the deaths and 40% of the hospitalizations due to adverse drug events.

Some practical ways to facilitate communication about a medication regimen include:

- Have a conversation with the doctor to **ask questions about the medicine**, e.g., why is it being prescribed, how often should it be taken, is it taken every day or for a specific period of time or indefinitely, etc.?
- Work with your home care nurse to **develop and maintain a list of all current medications**, including vitamins, and supplements (e.g., calcium) and post it in a prominent place at home. Keep a copy and bring it with you to all doctor visits—this will help your doctor keep your records up to date.
- **Become familiar with the medicines that have been prescribed**, what conditions they are for, and major side effects, if any. Discuss any side effects or allergic reactions, and how they should be treated with family, the doctor(s) and the caregiver team so that everyone will know what to expect.
- **Check with the doctor and/or the pharmacist before taking any over-the-counter medications** such as aspirin, other pain relievers, antacids or cold remedies. These may cause side effects when combined with regular medications.

The High Cost of Medication Errors

When a medication issue of any significance occurs it typically leads to repeat visits to the emergency room and/or the doctor, expensive treatments, and hospitalizations—all of which not only affect the quality and length of an individual's life, but also add to ever-increasing healthcare costs.

In an FDA study that assessed reports of medication errors, **the most common medication error was receiving an incorrect dose, and this one type of error was responsible for more than 40% of all deaths involving medication errors.**

Equally notable is that **nearly 50% of these errors occurred in individuals over the age of 60.** Older people are likely to be at a greater risk for medication errors because they typically take more than one medication.

Currently, all of this translates into more than \$77 billion per year in additional costs—to consumers, hospitals, insurers, and the government.

What has been done to address the issues around medication management?

Several leading healthcare accreditation organizations (e.g., the **Accreditation Commission for Health Care, the Community Health Accreditation Program, and the Joint Commission**) have also weighed in on this issue, and have determined that medication management must be incorporated into the continuum of care—from setting to setting.

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These organizations have established new standards to address the numerous issues surrounding medication management in both inpatient and outpatient settings.

Additionally, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration regularly reviews medication error reports from drug manufacturers and MedWatch. The agency also receives and reviews reports on medication errors from the Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) and the U.S. Pharmacopeia.

What can consumers and their families do?

Become aware and educated about medication safety, and work with the family doctor, your local pharmacist, and other healthcare providers to develop a practical understanding of medication and its appropriate use. That way, everyone can and should be smarter and safer about using their medication at home.

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