

KEEPING TRACK OF MEDICATIONS

Multiple prescriptions may be confusing

By PAULA VESS
Regional Marketing Group

SHELBY- In today's world of multiple prescriptions for different ailments or diseases, it's more important than ever to have an accurate list of your medications – both prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines. After all, medications are important. They can prolong your quality of life and prevent complications.

But if medication is not taken properly or is improperly mixed with others it can lead to problems. Each medication comes with its own instructions for when and how it is to be taken. Plus each has its own profile of side effects and possible interactions with food or other drugs. With all that information, taking more than one medication can be confusing.

"In today's environment of complex healthcare including multiple medical conditions and caregivers, the potential for harmful prescribing has increased exponentially," said Calvin Caunt, MD, Chief-of-Staff at Cleveland Regional Medical Center. "As a patient gets above taking a few medicines, two or three, the risks of adverse interactions increase profoundly."

Physicians and patient safety officials at Cleveland County HealthCare System (CCHS) are urging area residents to take the time to write down all their prescriptions, the dosage and any special instructions.

"A patient's list of medicines written by them is most likely to accurately reflect what the patient is truly taking," said Dr. Caunt.

It's also important to take the list to your next doctor's appointment and discuss the medications with each of your physicians. "The list provides an excellent means for the physician to review all of their

medicines with them," said Dr. Caunt, "including the benefits, potential for harm, redundancies, and interactions."

During an emergency department visit, having a list of your medications handy saves valuable time.

"A patient who comes in with a list of their current medications helps us make the right treatment decisions quickly," said James Bombenger, MD, Medical Director of Emergency Medicine for Cleveland County HealthCare System. "Being a patient in the emergency department is stressful and people can't always remember all of their medicines or the doses. It takes time to track down that information, but we need it in order to treat them safely."

Once you have your prescriptions and have discussed them with your doctor, it's important to follow the guidelines and instructions for their use. Problems occur when you stop taking or only occasionally remember to take your medications.

"Being aware of the medicines and their side effects is so important," said Anzie Horn, RN, Director of Care Solutions, CCHS' care management service. "Some medications need to be taken certain times of the day, with or without food as well as other factors that affect the medication's purpose."

You may stop taking your medications for many reasons. The drug may have side effects that you don't like or it may not seem to be working.

"We always recommend that individuals keep the doctor informed about changes - mental changes, physical changes, emotional changes - that may occur after a medication is started," said Horn.

Do not stop taking the medicine without talking to your doctor. By doing so,



To get a free medication record card, visit the information desks at Cleveland Regional Medical Center or Kings Mountain Hospital.

you don't get the benefit of a drug that you need for good health, your doctor does not have a clear picture of the effects of the drug on your illness and your doctor may make other treatment decisions based on the assumption that you are taking the medication.

Many patients generally try to follow a medication's guideline, but may frequently forget. Or you neglect taking the drug from time to time because you're not experiencing any symptoms.

"We reinforce that a person should not quit taking their medication, especially blood pressure medications, just because they feel better," said Horn.

If your blood pressure is high because you rarely take your medicine, your doctor needs to know. Otherwise, he or she may assume the treatment is not working and prescribe a larger dose or search for

another treatment option.

With most seniors, of course, it's an occasional miss, and it's usually because of forgetfulness or confusion. The more medications you take, the more difficult it is to keep track of them, and that's the reason to have a daily pill container.

"Some things that individuals can do for reminders are setting alarm clocks to go off when medications are due," said Horn, "or having a Lifeline unit that has medication reminders programmed in it."

It's also advisable to get your prescriptions filled at the same pharmacy so that one more knowledgeable person is reviewing what you're taking and looking for any possible drug interactions.

Establish a talking relationship with your pharmacist, if possible, and feel free to ask about any vitamins and supplements

you're taking as well as your prescription drugs. Medications have the potential to interact, even with over-the-counter medicines and supplements.

"There are multiple potential interactions," said Dr. Caunt, "including oral medications, injectable drugs, and topical agents as well as over-the-counter agents."

Don't forget to update your medication list when your physician adds a new medicine, tells you to stop taking a medicine or changes a dosage.

Your use, misuse or non-use of those medications could well be a matter of life and death.

"It is important to recognize that life threatening situations can arise, which lead to ER visits, hospitalizations and even deaths due to medication complications," said Dr. Caunt. "That is why keeping an up-to-date medication list and sharing it with healthcare providers is critical."

Families should discuss end-of-life issues, create advanced directives

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Long before The Patient Self-Determination Act of 1991 required healthcare institutions to ask every patient if they have an advance directive, the chaplains at Cleveland County HealthCare System knew families needed to talk about end-of-life care.

"Thirty years ago, I prayed that no family would show up in the ICU waiting room who did not know their loved one's preferences about life support," said Len Byers, Chaplain and Director of Pastoral Care for Cleveland County HealthCare System. "Families back then had no preparation for the



Len Byers

decisions we had to ask of them. It was the worst grief I had seen."

Advance directives are also known as living wills. These are formal documents that provide instructions for care in case the person becomes unable to make decisions. Another advance directive is a health care proxy or health care power of attorney, which allows the patient to designate a surrogate - a person who will make treatment decisions for the patient if the patient becomes unable to make such decisions.

Byers and the other chaplains at CCHS have spent the last 25 years encouraging families to talk to one another before the moment of decision arrives. "Our goal is to one day have no family come to our hospital without knowing what their loved one would want them to do," said Byers.

Discussing end-of-life issues with loved ones is the most important

thing, and having your wishes written down in the form of a living will or health care proxy helps families make decisions. It is also important to include your doctor in the conversation.

The work of the CCHS chaplains and others led to the formation of a group named Journey, a group of more than 20 healthcare organizations and service providers within the community who work together to educate everyone on preparing for end-of-life issues.

Members of Journey will participate in National HealthCare Decisions Day, on Friday, April 16, by setting up displays at various locations throughout the community, including Cleveland Regional Medical Center and Kings Mountain Hospital. They will be available to talk with you about advance directives and help you create one of your own if you choose to do so.

Want to learn more?

Celebrate National HealthCare Decision Day on April 16 by visiting these locations to find out about living wills and creating a healthcare power of attorney:

10 A.M. TO 3 P.M.

Cleveland Pines Nursing Center
Cleveland Regional Medical Center
Kings Mountain Hospital
Sterling House Shelby
Carillon Assisted Living
Hospice of Cleveland County
Neal Senior Center - Shelby

8 A.M. TO 3 P.M.

Life Enrichment - Shelby

8 A.M. TO 5 P.M.

Patrick Center - Kings Mountain

9 A.M. TO NOON

Crawley Memorial Hospital
Cleveland County Cooperative
Extension Center



Cancer Treatment That's Close to Home

Cleveland Regional Medical Center has been providing state-of-the-art cancer care to patients for more than 30 years. One of the first in the region to be certified by the American College of Surgeons, the Blumenthal Cancer Center at CRMC offers a multidisciplinary approach to cancer treatment and patient care. Specially trained radiation therapists, oncology nurses and others support board-certified medical and radiation oncologists and surgeons. Together, they work with patients and families to provide quality care and excellent service. **For more information call 980-487-3724**

Cleveland Regional Medical Center: 980-487-3000
Kings Mountain Hospital: 980-487-5000
www.ClevelandCountyHealthCareSystem.org



Cleveland County HealthCare System