

Lauren Motto

September 28th, 2012

English 3307

Musselman

Unit 1

CSE

Word Count: 1265

The Influence of Drug Packaging on Patient Adherence

The field of pharmacy in recent years has progressed toward a healthier future with innovative research and the patient in mind. By testing a pharmacy-based intervention method on patients with serious mental illnesses (SMI), a team of researchers has proven there is an inexpensive approach to help patients take their needed medications. Valenstein et al. explained in their research “Using A Pharmacy-Based Intervention To Improve Antipsychotic Adherence Among Patients With Serious Mental Illness¹,” which was published in the Schizophrenia Bulletin, how a change in packaging can revolutionize the way patients stay on a medication cycle. This knowledge front of the effects of pharmacists being more involved in the patient’s life will provide insight to a new part of the field.

Valenstein et al. explored the potential in using a variation of packaging and more direct contact with patients to improve medication possession ratios (MPRs)¹. Patients who require medication multiple times a day do not always adhere to their dosage schedule. To conduct an experiment involving patients with SMI and low MPRs, researchers looked into how a more pharmaceutically active approach would affect patient’s adherence to their medical instructions¹. This was accomplished through the use of different packaging for the test group’s medication and pharmacies mailing letters and calling to remind patients to refill their prescription¹. The study conducted by the research team was based on previous studies of the same experimental design. In the two previous cases the participants of the first were elderly and the second were diabetics and those suffering from hypertension¹. In both of these studies the same results were found, that the new system increased the patient’s adherence to their program¹. Valenstein et al.

wanted to answer the question of whether this type of plan would also help the mentally ill.

Based on the research conducted, it is clear that members of health related professions are concerned with their patient's adherence to their medication schedules. With the participants in the experiment only taking their medication approximately 50% of the time, doctors and pharmacists are concerned about how their patients can function on a day-to-day basis¹. In the field as a whole, pharmacists want to not only help find the proper medication for each of their patients, but make sure the individual is capable of following the given instructions. Although pharmacists cannot be fully involved with the regular lives of each patient, there is a strong push toward finding better treatment plans. This concern has helped shape the experiment conducted by the researching team from this article.

Within this experiment it was assumed by Valenstein et al. that the patients in the study were not following their medication schedule due to their illness opposed to another outside factor. The study argues that an easy-to-follow system can be introduced and help the mentally ill remember to take their medication¹. It was found that at the end of the yearlong study, the test group took their medication more frequently than the control group¹. These results show that this system would be better for a wide variety of patients. This is still an area of dispute, though, due to the fact that not all pharmacists are actively helping their patients in this way, but this article should help convince the field of the many benefits. One of the secondary discoveries of this experiment was how inexpensive treatment such as this would be to implement in the health care system today. The different packaging would not increase costs by any significant amount and pharmacy technicians would complete most prescription tracking and packaging to reduce labor costs¹. With a system such as this, the costs would be low and the patients would benefit from effective pharmaceutical help.

I chose this article based on its relevance to health care costs in today's economy. Exploring the concept of an affordable, simple solution to patients forgetting or outright refusing to take their medications will hopefully lead to improvements in the health care professional to patient relationship. I appreciated how the research team took an experiment already conducted on the elderly, diabetics, and those suffering from chronic

hypertension and applied it to the mentally ill. By exploring this idea on another level with an alternative demographic, the team was able to show how this is a plausible solution to something that was marginalized before. I was also drawn to the experimental goals for accomplishment since the study looked into several different aspects of pharmacy as well as practices. Another subsequent goal was to see the effects of the experiment on the quality of life of the test group patients and overall satisfaction¹. With all of these objectives met, the successful experiment was able to confirm the results of the previous studies. As a student, I find it interesting that packaging can play such an important role in a patient's adherence to a program. At Northeastern the pharmacy classes I have and will be taking seem to focus more on the drug contents and effects. This article helped me realize that there is more to pharmacy than filling prescriptions and there are several opportunities to break away from that stereotype.

The report caused me some confusion in sections such as results or data analysis, but overall upon careful consideration and processing I was able to fully understand its contents. Although this experiment was able to answer several questions, further research can be conducted. Something the researchers should consider is the fact that not everyone using medication has difficulty adhering to scheduling doses. Would this new system yield the same results or pose as a nuisance to regular patients on daily medication? Also, 97% of the participants in this experiment were men¹. An additional study on this subject could be conducted to see if women have a comparable positive increase in willingness to follow the dosage instructions compared to the male majority in this particular one.

While many researchers are currently looking for various cures and alternative forms of medication, this particular study showed that the method of supplying the medicine for patients can also play an important role. By closing this gap of knowledge, pharmacists are allowing new techniques to be considered for daily use. Adherence to a medication schedule is important, and the benefits of this study focusing on the mentally ill proved that a new system would assist many.

Works Cited

1. Valenstein M, Kavanagh J, Lee T, Reilly P, Dalack G W, Grabowski J, Smelson D, Ronis D L, Ganoczy D, Woltmann E, Metreger T, Wolschon P, Jensen A, Poddig B, Blow F C. 2011. Using A Pharmacy-Based Intervention To Improve Antipsychotic Adherence Among Patients With Serious Mental Illness. In: Oxford Journal [Internet]. Schizophrenia Bulletin. [cited 2012 September 10]. 37 (4): 727-735. Available from: <http://schizophreniabulletin.oxfordjournals.org/content/37/4/727.abstract>

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank several people for helping me finish this Unit 1 paper. My roommate Natasha Sporborg, my suitemate Zan Wong, and my boyfriend John Geurds all read and edited my first draft before submission and helped pick out grammatical and technical errors. Lauren Thatcher in the Northeastern University Writing Center also read through my draft and gave me content suggestions and helped me format my citations. My two peer reviewers were Caitlin Morelli and Dylan Kaufman. I would like to thank them both for their feedback and helping me make my paper less specific and more aimed for a peer audience. Finally, I would like to thank my father Richard Motto. He is always the last person to read a paper before I submit it and I appreciate all of his feedback.