

Take your medication and stay out of the hospital.

Welcome to SBH Bronx Health Talk produced by SBH Health System and broadcast from St. Barnabas Hospital in the Bronx. I'm Steven Clark.

Not surprisingly, studies show that better medication compliance, getting medication filled properly and taking it as prescribed, is associated with reduced 30-day hospital readmission rates. Conversely those patients who don't follow medication plans have more than a two-and-a-half times greater chance of being re-admitted to the hospital within a month. This is particularly true among patients who suffer from certain conditions like cardiovascular disease.

With me today to discuss this is Dr. Ruth Cassidy, senior vice president of clinical support services and chief pharmacy officer at SBH Health System. Welcome Dr. Cassidy. So let's start out um from your perspective how big a problem is medication management or lack of medication compliance.

It's quite large. The statistics you just gave you know are part of the truth of why I think that medication management is a concern. Many people wind up back in the ED just for the fact that they just don't take their medications and there's several reasons for that.

Is it is it mostly older people who have this issue? You know people maybe because of a memory issues or because they're taking so many medications that tend to be most at risk?

Well I they are certainly more vulnerable. They're certainly more at risk but they are not the only ones who do not take medications. A lot of people don't take medications either they forget you know i can forget even just taking vitamins uh you know you just don't take it every day you forget and also this the cost of medication. Some medications are very costly and so they're given a prescription, they go to the pharmacy to fill it and they find out the cost and they say oh forget it I'm not taking that and that's also a problem for the elderly, right? They're on a limited income and they just can't afford the medication so they won't take it every day, they'll cut them in half, they'll take it every other day so there's a lot of a lot of compounding factors that kind of come into play.

I guess also there's certain myths about taking medication like if it worked for my friend I can take it or you know if I take two today it'll make up for not taking it yesterday.

Well there's definitely issues with how to take and compliance issues for sure. One, you should never take somebody else's medication because you know medications are prescribed with the patient's health and mind so that's always very risky. The other thing is that you know they feel that they may have a medication that's been sitting in their closet or pillbox for a long time and they can continue to take it forever. Now there are expiration dates on medications and they don't often know what they are and so they could be taking medications that are expired thinking that they're perfectly fine.

I know you know seniors are not the only ones who have issues with medication management but if you're a caregiver to an elderly parent what can you do to make it easier for them?

There's a couple of things. One, you need to be very intricately involved for that person, right? you need any time that they're getting medication that person should probably be there speaking to the care person so you know the licensed independent practitioner whether it's a nurse practitioner or physician so that they hear everything and they understand because with elderly you may have to repeat why they're taking it very often. The other thing that we do now is co-mingling, they call it packaging and so elderly for one take just a laundry list sometimes of medication unfortunately and that's also something that has to be looked at by the pharmacist, but once that regimen is actually hard-coded and we know exactly what they should be taking we can package it in such a way that all their medications are together to be taken in the morning and then all co-mingled together for the afternoon and the same for the evening so they know exactly what to take and that makes it easier for them as well.

So I guess hospitals like St. Barnabas have a big part and a big part in making sure that people at least leave the hospital with some idea of what they should be taking, right?

Well that's one of our biggest initiatives and one of the largest reasons why this pharmacy and pharmacies within a hospital are so important since the number one reason for patients coming back into the hospital is that they don't take them if we have a program in place which we do we call it the meds to beds program is in place. These individuals then have the medications in their hand. Pharmacists can come up to them and explain to them why it's important that they take the medication and you can deal with all the issues that they have so if the cost was too much we can take that back and say okay here's some other options to the physicians to say you know what this particular medication is very expensive but we have an older alternative that's much less costly to the individual. The other thing is we, because we're an indigent population and we serve an indigent population we're a safety net hospital, and so we can get medications at a very very reduced cost and we can pass along those savings to our patients we already started talking about it briefly.

Tell me more about this outpatient pharmacy that was open six months ago at the hospital.

Yeah so, very happy to have it finally opened it. Covid slowed us down because of construction and things like that so it did open in January and since January we're only open now uh six months. We have seen just a dramatic increase in number of prescriptions that we are filling in and we see the benefit so where before with the meds to beds program we could only do say 10 because we were dealing with a lot of the outpatient pharmacies and locally in the area we've seen it go up to 50, 55 on the units where almost 60 of our patients are choosing the pharmacy and having the medications in their hand before they go home. Now so you may ask why are some of the patients not I think that's an education for us to meet with some of these patients and we're starting to do that. They don't realize that we will deliver. They don't realize that we can mail if they want to them and they don't realize that that the benefits that having the pharmacy here and the continuity of care that we provide because we have their medical record at our fingertips. We know exactly what the doctors were thinking. We know what medications are going to work best and again if they have problems we can resolve those easily be so that they don't have any issues before they go home or after they go home.

I know one of the concerns when a patient leaves the hospital with new prescriptions for medication is they may have been taking a lot of other medications as well so I would assume that before they leave someone educates them on how this new medication or new medications fits into their home medication regimen, right?

Exactly and actually that happens quite often so they have they come in with their list of medications and for a number of reasons when you're in the hospital sometimes we have a formulary here and so they're switched off of what they currently take to something that's similar but not exactly the same medication but does you know works exact so it's therapeutically equivalent that has to be when they get to discharge that has to be reversed right? So you have to remember because you have that list what they're taking it home and they have those medications at home so you don't want to give them another prescription that's therapeutically equivalent because what they wind up doing is taking this two medications when they get home so yes that's another thing we have that we know their record we know what they're taking at home and we can tell them look either you can stop what you're taking at home or finish it and then we'll fill this prescription if it's less costly or if it's a slightly different medication or we can say you know what you don't need to take this medication that you're taking in the hospital any longer and you can just go back to taking the medication you were taking at home.

Is it fair to say that many like you mentioned earlier people don't take medication because they're concerned about the cost does the hospital like St. Barnabas offer programs or at least educate patients where they can get medication even more affordable price?

So I alluded to that a little while ago it's called a 340b program and so yes because we are a safety net hospital we are part of a program where we can purchase medications at an extremely reduced cost and we are able to then pass that savings off to our patients so yes we can have medications much to you know that are much much more less expensive than what patients could receive outside.

The new pharmacy in the hospital is also available for outpatients as well right?

Oh absolutely so the thing is right now the location of the pharmacy is past the lobby so it's not it doesn't have a window front so people may not see it but it's absolutely it's the same as any other pharmacy you would see in the community. you can any patient or someone off the street could walk in and fill their prescription so all our employees can have their prescriptions filled there and any patient can have their prescription filled there.

And also you can uh as you mentioned you'll deliver prescriptions as well expeditiously?

Yes we actually teamed up we with a partner that does delivery. ; It's kind of like it's not Uber it's uh Uber like i guess uh but they are very proficient at delivering. They come here often every day to pick up those prescriptions and deliver it to the patient and in fact they can download an app and follow where that prescription is in its uh route to them so they would know when it's arriving and then they sign for it when once they receive it.

Are over-the-counter products also available in pharmacy?

Absolutely. We can the same as any outpatient pharmacy we can order any outpatient over-the-counter prescription medication that a patient needs.

Now tell me you're also opening up a specialty pharmacy across the street on Third Avenue in the Bronx. What's the reasons for that and what is that going to offer?

So we just mentioned that the this particular pharmacy one of the reasons is that it's within the four walls of the hospital and so it's not often seen. What the new pharmacy will allow as a storefront right so people will see it and it'll be right off the street so patients within the community that maybe haven't come into the hospital will see that that pharmacy is available to them. So that's one reason the second is related to specialty meds and what I mean by that is some medications have a very restricted distribution and only certain pharmacies that are considered specialty pharmacies they have a special URAC accreditation can fill those medications so we will be applying for the URAC accreditation for that specialty pharmacy so that we can also fill those very limited they're usually very expensive rheumatoid arthritis medications, some oncology medications uh that cannot be filled by just any community pharmacy. They have to have this URAC accreditation so we will have that the third is it'll be much larger uh it'll have a lot more clinical support so right now we have clinical pharmacists who if there are questions about medications they're right there to help. Now they'll be visible so you'll be able to meet with those pharmacists if you have any clinical concerns and the clinical pharmacist will follow up with those patients to make sure that they're taking the medications. If they have any issues with the medications that those issues are addressed.

What is the time frame. When is that going to open?

So we've already started. We've received you know we have all the drawings for Construction. We're hoping that by the end of the year that will be up and running.

Okay. Uh in general I know you know people either if they've been in the hospital or whether they're outpatients they always have questions about their medication and they say well I'll call the doctor but they're a little afraid to call the doctor. They may not get an answer. Can they call a pharmacist?

Absolutely and honestly the pharmacist is the best person for them to call because they're the ones that are most knowledgeable about medications and they're the most knowledgeable about their entire regimen. Sometimes when you go to it could be a primary care but sometimes you go to a specialty physician you may be going to a cardiologist and he doesn't have your full regimen and the full scope of the medications that you're on. The pharmacist has that information and can actually speak to not only that medication but all the medications that you're on so that's why again in the specialty pharmacy that clinical pharmacist will be readily available as well you can ask the pharmacist right now in the current pharmacy just these clinical pharmacists will be right there to answer questions at any point.

Okay uh with the pharmacy that is now open within the walls of the hospital is there a phone number that people could call to uh to get to fill their prescriptions?

Yes, that number is 718-960-3172. There's also an email uh because some people you know are more savvy with email and that would be OPDpharmacy@sbhny.org.

Okay, great let me give you that that phone number one more time 718-960-3172.

Dr. Cassidy thank you for spending some time with us today and to our listeners thank you for joining us. For more information on services available at SBH Health System visit www.sbhny.org. Until next time.