Ethnic Minorities Less Likely to Adhere to Drug Regimens

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Medication non-adherence, or failure to stick to a scheduled drug regimen, is a major health problem in the United States. It's estimated to cause 125,000 deaths each year and increase annual medical spending by an estimated $100 billion to $300 billion. Now, a study by Global Advertising Strategies (GAS) shows how and why non-adherence is higher among ethnic minorities than among whites.

The report, titled "Blueprint for an Effective Cross-Cultural Medication Adherence Program," presents four distinct culture-specific categories of issues that lead to non-adherence. These include core beliefs about the nature of health and illness—which may conflict with Western medical science; cultural norms and values; communication styles; and family dynamics.

The report also presents 14 specific examples of how cultural variations in each category can lead to non-adherence. These include assumptions that medications work solely to alleviate acute symptoms rather than chronic problems; unfamiliarity with a health care system that requires prescriptions and pharmacy visits to refill medications; sharing medications with family members—thus leaving the patient without enough doses to complete the regimen; and reduction or rejection of conventional drugs in favor of traditional medicine.

"Relative to non-Hispanic white patients, Hispanics and African Americans are believed to index 20 percent lower when it comes to medication adherence," said Marc Duquette, GAS general counsel and vice president of corporate development. "A lack of culturally adapted informational tools and educational resources, and issues in communication with health care professionals all contribute to alarming non-adherence statistics within those communities."

In pointing out that ethnic minorities in the United States form an increasingly large segment of the U.S. population, the report's authors emphasize the need for health care marketers and providers to connect with minority patients and communicate the importance of medication adherence. But it's equally important for minority patients to educate themselves and their communities about the dangers of non-adherence.

The report is available for a limited time at global-ny.com/insights.

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