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New study finds real life makes following doctor's orders difficult to manage chronic disease

Busy schedules, holidays and travel can result in wrong, dangerous dosing

AURORA, Colo. (Jan. 19, 2021) - Many patients with chronic disease may intend to follow their doctor's orders to diet, take their medicine and exercise, but a new study finds that everyday life often gets in the way. When that happens, the study found patients can become stressed and overwhelmed and might lie about dosing or even create their own remedies.

The findings were released in a study led by Mustafa Ozkaynak, PhD, at the University of Colorado College of Nursing, and [published January 18, 2021 in JMIR Publications](#).

“This highlights a significant gap between what clinicians ask of patients and what is actually happening when they get home and self-manage their chronic disease,” said associate professor Mustafa Ozkaynak. “It points to the need for better management systems with technology, more collaboration, and recognition about how patients’ social environments impact their health care.”

The 39 patients involved in the study were being treated with the medicine Warfarin, an anticoagulant that prevents clots from forming in the blood. While the patients received specific directions from their doctors about dosing, some patients told researchers they had trouble remembering when to take it, and struggled to fit the habit into their busy work and family lives. When doctors later asked if they’d missed taking any medication, some patients said, “I usually lie to [providers]...because it was easier.” Other patients changed their dosing to treat symptoms as they saw fit, according to the study,

Patients also struggled to routinely perform therapy-related activities because of their social and extracurricular activities. Holidays, travel and religious and seasonal events also made it difficult for them to complete their physical therapy.

The study also showed patients had trouble following the doctor’s advice to follow a specific diet for their chronic disease. Some patients snuck in forbidden foods. Others, who were not allowed to drink, drank anyway, then “took in even more greens to counteract the alcohol.”

Researchers recommend clinicians take big steps to understand how social, environmental, personal and economic factors impact patients' abilities to follow medical and physical therapy orders. Those steps, the study says, should include collaborative health information technologies, novel education initiatives and programs that integrate health care and community resources.

The study co-authors include: Rupa Valdez PhD, Department of Public Health Sciences, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA; Katie Hannah MPH, College of Nursing, University of Colorado-Denver; Gina Woodhouse BHc, University of Colorado Hospital, Aurora, CO; and Patrick Klem PharmD, University of Colorado Hospital, Aurora, CO.

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