

# Supporting Appropriate Adherence to Oral Oncology Medications

## Dispensing pharmacists play a critical role in helping patients follow the treatment regimens prescribed by their physicians

Oral oncology medications account for up to 40% of pipeline oncology agents.<sup>1</sup> While oral medications may be more convenient than infused products, it is important to address variable rates of adherence and persistence, and resulting higher inpatient/outpatient costs, with the use of these agents.<sup>2,3</sup>

### Factors contributing to nonadherence<sup>2,4</sup>

The following factors are associated with patients not adhering to oral oncology treatment:

- Complex treatment regimen
- Poor communication with providers
- Use of retail pharmacies
- Higher copayment
- Patient dissatisfaction with care

### Factors contributing to adherence<sup>2</sup>

- Good communication with health care team
- Education, including communicating the importance of a treatment regimen
- Medication-taking systems
- Help from a caregiver
- Reinforcing desired behavior and good communication
- Setting expectations about side effects



Room for improvement  
in adherence<sup>5</sup>

46%-100%  
**adherence**

has been noted in adult patients  
taking oral oncology medications

## Working With Patients to Support Appropriate Adherence

The shift to oral oncology medications is transforming the role of the oncology pharmacist. Pharmacists can proactively help their patient and his or her care team overcome challenges, while also working to help manage common side effects.

### Actions to improve adherence

For some patients, the following actions can help<sup>3,6</sup>:

- Suggest reminders to take medications (by caregiver or with an alarm)
- Emphasize the importance of not skipping doses and not splitting tablets that are not scored unless directed to do so by his or her physician
- Confirm that your patient understands all of his or her physician's instructions

#### Provide educational resources about

- Disease information
- Risks and benefits of treatment
- Proper use of medication and side effects

### Consider potential barriers to patient understanding

One or more of the following considerations may be relevant when discussing appropriate adherence and side effects of oral oncology agents with patients<sup>3,7</sup>:

- Language
- Literacy
- Age
- Hearing, vision
- Color blindness
- Psychological conditions
- Motor skills
- Motivation
- Religion
- Diet

### You've instructed your patients. Have they understood?\*

Patient education supports appropriate adherence to therapy. Ask your patient the following questions:

- What is the name of your cancer medication?
- Should your pill/tablet be taken with or without food?
- When will you take your cancer medication?
- Where will you store your medication?

### Patients should follow their physician's instructions about their treatment and should contact their physician if they are having any problems or concerns.

**References:** 1. Rosenthal M. *Pharmacy Practice News*. New drug approvals for 2018: strong specialty pipeline. <https://www.pharmacypracticenews.com/Article/PrintArticle?articleID=46640>. Published January 11, 2018. Accessed March 13, 2020. 2. Hohneker J, Shah-Mehta S, Brandt PS. Perspectives on adherence and persistence with oral medications for cancer treatment. *J Oncol Pract*. 2011;7(1):65-67. 3. Ruddy K, Mayer E, Partridge A. Patient adherence and persistence with oral anticancer treatment. *CA Cancer J Clin*. 2009;59(1):56-66. 4. Weingart SN, Bach PB, Johnson SA, et al. NCCN task force report: oral chemotherapy. *J Natl Compr Canc Netw*. 2008;6(suppl 3):S1-S14. [http://www.nccn.org/JNCCN/PDF/JNSU3\\_combined\\_Oral\\_Chemo\\_2008.pdf](http://www.nccn.org/JNCCN/PDF/JNSU3_combined_Oral_Chemo_2008.pdf). Accessed December 14, 2015. 5. Greer JA, Amoyal N, Nisotel L, et al. A systematic review of adherence to oral antineoplastic therapies. *Oncologist*. 2016;21(3):354-376. 6. Medina PJ. Improving patient outcomes with standardization. *J Hematol Oncol Pharm*. 2015;5(2). <http://jhoponline.com/jhop-issue-archive/2015-issues/june-vol-5-no-2/16471-improving-patient-outcomes-with-standardization>. Accessed March 13, 2020. 7. Rittenberg CN, Johnson J, Kav S, Barber L, Lemonde M. Multinational Association of Supportive Care in Cancer (MASCC). MASCC oral agent teaching tool (MOATT). MASCC teaching tool for patients receiving oral agents for cancer. [https://www.mascc.org/assets/Guidelines-Tools/moatt\\_v1.2.pdf](https://www.mascc.org/assets/Guidelines-Tools/moatt_v1.2.pdf). Published September 9, 2016. Accessed March 13, 2020.

