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3 steps to cut down time spent on Rx renewals

You and your practice team could be spending several hundred hours on prescription renewals each year. What if you could get most of that time back while also ensuring your patients don't run out of medications between appointments? Here's a physician-proven solution that you can implement in your practice right away.



Random prescription renewals have become so ingrained in office-based practices that you may not have even realized that it was an inefficient allocation of resources. But synchronizing prescription renewals—renewing all of a patient's stable medications for 12-15 months—can save your practice time and money, so you can dedicate more time to directly caring for patients.

Consider a hypothetical scenario of an internal medicine practice that has not implemented a synchronized prescription renewal process. This practice has 1,000 patients with chronic illnesses and an average of five medications per patient. Every year, each patient makes an average of two calls per prescription. Each call lasts about two minutes. These factors result in more than 300 hours of physician and staff time spent on prescription renewals per year.

"When I asked people if they need a refill, if they had 10 pills in the bottle, they'd say no. Then they would call the next week for refills," said James Jerzak, MD, a family medicine physician in Wisconsin. "This takes away the calls It definitely improves efficiency of the day. Everything is done and closed by the time I leave the office."

A [free online module](#) in the AMA's [STEPS Forward](#) collection shows you how to take steps to save time and improve care by synchronizing prescription renewal. Visit the module to calculate how much time your practice is spending on prescription renewals and how much you could save by synchronizing them.

Follow these three steps to synchronize prescription renewals.

1. At a dedicated annual comprehensive care visit, renew all medications for chronic illness for the maximum duration allowed by state law.

This annual visit is a good time to start synchronizing prescriptions because during this visit, you'll

thoroughly review the patient's medical history, including past and present medications. Get answers to specific questions about this process in the module.

2. Include instructions for the pharmacy on all prescription modifications and renewals as applicable.

For example, "Do not fill until patient calls" might be an instruction to include. The module includes answers to questions you might have about interacting with the pharmacy during this process.

3. Take the opportunity to review all of the patient's prescriptions for chronic conditions when you receive a prescription renewal request.

When you're busy, you may be tempted to renew only the requested medication. However, renewing all prescriptions at the time of one medication request will reduce the subsequent number of calls for refills. This is especially important during the first year.

Adapted from AMA Wire®

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