Patient, physician and pharmacist: Joint action to increase the adherence to medication

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Background
Medication adherence usually refers to whether patients take their medications as prescribed and whether they continue to take a prescribed medication. The impact of poor adherence grows as the burden of chronic disease grows worldwide. Adherence to long-term therapy for chronic illnesses in developed countries averages 50%.

Methods
The cross-sectional survey was conducted at 106 Zagreb, Croatia pharmacies and the questionnaire was filled out by the study subjects. We used a 33-item self-administered questionnaire that included a convenience sample of 635 individuals who were buying drugs for the treatment of chronic diseases. Study subjects were divided into two groups, with adherent defined as a “yes” response to the statement that they “never fail to take their medication on time.”

Results
In our study population (n = 635), non-adherent subjects prevailed over adherent subjects (n = 370; 58.3% vs. n = 265; 41.7%). The most common diagnoses were diseases of the circulatory system (n = 500; 36.8%) and endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases (n = 285; 21.0%). The great majority of study subjects reported forgetfulness (“I just forgot”) as the main reason for skipping drug doses, followed by being away from home and shortage of the drug (having consumed it all). Comparison of reasons for medication noncompliance in the total study population versus subjects on antihypertensive therapy showed no statistically significant difference in any of the reasons (P = 0.895).

Conclusions
Nonadherence to medication is a growing concern to patients, physicians, healthcare systems, and other stakeholders because that it is prevalent and associated with adverse outcomes and higher costs of care. There is usually no single reason for medication nonadherence, and therefore must be a comprehensive approach to improve adherence. Research on adherence has typically focused on the barriers patients face in taking their medications. Common barriers to adherence are under the patient’s control, so that attention to them is a necessary and important step in improving adherence.

Key messages:
- Nonadherence to medication is a growing concern to the health care system
- Barriers to adherence are under the patient’s control