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U.S. Surgeon General Joins Baltimore Launch of the National Script Your Future Campaign to Highlight Importance of Taking Medication as Directed

New public opinion research shows need for tools and resources to support medication adherence, more open conversations between health care professionals and patients about the health consequences of non-adherence

While most Americans recognize the importance of taking prescribed medication as directed, people who skip or forget doses are less likely to understand the health consequences of medication non-adherence, according to a new survey released this morning by the National Consumers League (NCL) as part of its national *Script Your Future* campaign. At today's Baltimore launch of the multi-year national *Script Your Future* campaign, Surgeon General Regina Benjamin encouraged patients with chronic conditions to speak with their health care professionals about their medication.

Poor medication adherence is a growing public health concern, and addressing the problem is especially critical as the number of Americans affected by at least one chronic condition requiring medication therapy is expected to grow from 133 to 157 million by 2020. Nearly three out of four Americans report that they do not always take their medication as directed, a problem that causes more than one-third of medicine-related hospitalizations, nearly 125,000 deaths in the United States each year, and adds \$290 billion in avoidable costs to the health care system annually.

"Our national challenge is to prevent poor health outcomes and to become a healthy and fit nation. One way is for the health care community and patients to come together to address medication non-adherence, which is a major public health problem," said Dr. Benjamin. "Doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other health care professionals can help prevent many serious health complications by initiating conversations with their patients about the importance of taking medication as directed. This is especially important for people with chronic health conditions such as diabetes, asthma and high blood pressure, who may have a number of medicines to take each day."

Script Your Future brings together Baltimore area stakeholders in health care, business and government to offer practical tools for patients to help them better adhere to their medication, and to help health care professionals better communicate with patients. Baltimore is one of six regional target markets in which the campaign will pilot interventions, outreach activities, research and advertising. The local coalition includes more than a dozen Baltimore-based health care stakeholders including University of Maryland School of Pharmacy, the Maryland Pharmacists Association, and Pfizer. Today's event is also an official stop on the AARP/Walgreens Wellness Tour, which provides mobile health tests to communities across the country.

(More)

The consumer survey results released today show that nationally and in Baltimore, those patients who do not always take their medication as directed are less likely to have received a full explanation of the consequences of their condition, and are less convinced of the importance of adherence.

Communication between patients and their health care professionals is one key factor. More than three quarters (79 percent) of patients in Baltimore say they are very willing to raise questions or concerns about prescribed medicines with their health care professional, but only 55 percent say their doctor routinely asks about problems taking medication. Among less adherent patients, communication with health care professionals is even less frequent.

“There are many reasons why people don’t take their medicine as directed, from concerns about side effects to the out-of-pocket costs of prescriptions, but the more a patient understands the impact medication has on their health, the more likely they are to keep up with their medication. Script Your Future is working in Baltimore and communities across the country to encourage more conversations about the health consequences of non-adherence and to provide patients and their health care professionals with a range of online tools and resources to help improve adherence among patients with chronic conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes and asthma,” said Rebecca Burkholder, Vice President of Health Policy for the NCL.

The survey, conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, also found that patients view automatic refills, reduced co-pays and pill boxes as useful tools for improving adherence. In particular, three quarters of Baltimore patients find a list of questions for their healthcare professional to be a helpful tool.

“As we launch the campaign locally, the research reinforces the need to make medication adherence a priority in Baltimore, where 14 percent of residents are living with diabetes and 1 in 3 with high blood pressure,” said Cherokee Layson-Wolf, PharmD., CGP, Associate Professor, University of Maryland, School of Pharmacy. “Our local efforts are aimed at raising awareness and making tools for adherence more accessible to consumers.”

Script Your Future tools include free text message reminders, sample questions for patients to ask health care practitioners, medication lists, condition management sheets, and fact sheets on common chronic conditions. All of these materials can be found on the campaign website, www.ScriptYourFuture.org.

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Script Your Future is a campaign of the National Consumers League (NCL), a private, non-profit membership organization founded in 1899. For more information about the Script Your Future campaign, visit www.ScriptYourFuture.org. For more information on NCL, please visit www.nclnet.org.