

Encourage Low-Literacy Patients to Ask Questions

BY NADJA GEIPERT
Contributing Writer

IRVINE, CALIF. — Keep an eye out for patients who are at high risk for low health literacy—typically seniors, immigrants, those with low levels of education, Medicaid recipients, and those in poor health, Jeannette Hilgert said at a meeting sponsored by the Institute for Healthcare Advancement.

Once you've identified a patient with

low health literacy, adjust your approach, said Ms. Hilgert, program administrator at the Venice (Calif.) Family Clinic.

Speak slowly, use plain, nonmedical language, and repeat the important information, she advised.

It is also a good idea to review written materials for clarity and simplicity. Consider using a variety of visual aids that portray written instructions, such as prescription instructions and preventive strategies. Recent studies indicate that

patients' adherence to medical instructions improved by at least 25% when the instructions were supplemented with visual aids.

Health care visits are particularly overwhelming and confusing to patients with chronic medical conditions, Ms. Hilgert said.

A survey at the Venice Family Clinic showed that 33% of patients do not initiate discussions about their health with their doctor. Half said they did not ask

questions because they either did not know how, or they felt that their doctor knew best.

To address this insecurity, encourage patients to ask lots of questions and to take an active part in their own care.

An equal partnership between physician and patient can increase the likelihood of positive health outcomes, said Marian Ryan, corporate director of disease management and health education for Molina Healthcare Inc.

"Self-management is key. Without it, patients can't be active partners," Ms. Ryan said.

Patients who get involved in their health care experience an increased sense of control and may be motivated to take better care of themselves. This effect increases with the length of time patients are actively involved in their own health care.

"Once they get excited by one step they took that led to success, they start inquiring," Ms. Hilgert said about patients she observed at the Venice Family Clinic.

It follows naturally that patients who ask more questions and are actively involved in their care are more likely to follow their physicians' medical advice, she added. ■

Available



FOSAMAX PLUS D is a trademark of Merck & Co., Inc.



MERCK ©2005 Merck & Co., Inc. All rights reserved.

20503906(1)-FOS

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Bayer HealthCare LLC	
ALEVE	33
Bristol-Myers Squibb Sanofi-Synthelabo Partnership	
Avalide	6a-6d, 7
Bristol-Myers Squibb Medical Imaging, Inc.	
Cardiolite	50a-50b
Forest Pharmaceuticals, Inc.	
Combunox	9-12
Campral	26a-26b
Namenda	38a-38b, 53-57
Lexapro	58a-58b
HemoSense, Inc.	
INRatio	41
King Pharmaceuticals, Inc.	
Sonata	30a-30b
LifeScan, Inc.	
OneTouch	13
Eli Lilly and Company	
Humalog	67-68
Merck & Co., Inc.	
Vytorin	22a-22b, 23
Zetia	46a-46b
Fosamax Plus D	66
Novo Nordisk Inc.	
NovoLog	45-46
Pfizer Inc.	
Lipitor	3-4
Viagra	29-30
Caduet	34-37
National Pain Forum 2005	40
Roche Laboratories Inc. and GlaxoSmithKline	
Boniva	15-18
Sanofi Aventis	
Ambien	49
Sanofi Pasteur Inc.	
Pertussis	20-21
Sepracor, Inc.	
Lunesta	61-64
Takeda Pharmaceuticals America, Inc.	
ROZEREM	18a-18b
Wyeth Pharmaceuticals Inc.	
Effexor XR	42a-42d
Wyeth Pharmaceuticals Inc. and Monarch Pharmaceuticals, Inc.	
ALTACE	25-26