

IMPROVING MEDICATION ACCESS THROUGH PATIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Objective

To (1) describe pharmaceutical manufacturer sponsored patient assistance programs available and the enrollment process involved and (2) using a convenience sample, describe an experience of assisting patients in accessing such programs through MEDBANK of Maryland.

Methods

Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs) were identified through internet searches and company contact. Program details were verified by contacting participating companies to ensure accurate program details including eligibility criteria and drug availability. MEDBANK of Maryland is a statewide non-profit organization working to help the uninsured and underinsured who are eligible for PAPs gain access to free prescription medications by assisting patients through the application process. In order to demonstrate the complexity of accessing patient assistance programs, a convenience sample was generated from data on patients enrolled in the MEDBANK system. We assessed the number of medications requested and received, the class of medications requested and, for the average patient, how many company programs were utilized in attempt to acquire the patients medication needs.

Results

Approximately eighty pharmaceutical companies offer PAPs for branded medications. Programs vary based on income eligibility, required financial and medical documentation, and program cost. Using the convenience sample of MEDBANK enrollees, we find that the median patient requests 6 medications. In order to fulfill medication requests, the majority of patients accessed programs from multiple sponsors.

Conclusions

Patient Assistance Programs help individuals overcome the cost barrier in accessing necessary medications. Lack of knowledge of such programs and the complex application process inhibit patient access to needed assistance. Pharmacists are uniquely positioned to educate patients lacking prescription drug coverage on the availability of Patient Assistance Programs.