QUESTIONS ABOUT MEDICATION MANAGEMENT

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to the June 2012 article, “Improving Medication Management among At-Risk Older Adults” (Martin, Kripalani, & DuRapau, 2012). I appreciate the contribution that the authors have made to the growing need for innovative strategies that address health literacy concerns in older adults, as well as strategies that address safety concerns surrounding polypharmacy. However, I am respectfully raising the following topics for review.

First of all, the sample PictureRx™ (Martin et al., 2012, p. 26) contains another possible risk for older adults—a risk for falling. In the example, the diuretic furosemide has been prescribed for John Doe, with 40 mg to be taken orally in the morning and again in the evening. Asking an older adult to take 40 mg of a diuretic agent in the evening could lead to a risk of falling during the night as the medicine continues its action on the loop of Henle in the kidneys. Is a 2 p.m. dose a safer option?

Second, the authors’ exclusion criteria for the pilot study included non-English-speaking individuals and those with a documented diagnosis of severe dementia. However, I am also wondering about vision and hearing abilities of participants. With the National Center for Health Statistics reporting one in six older adults with visual impairment and one in four with hearing impairment (Dillon, Gu, Hoffman, & Ko, 2010), it seems reasonable to assess vision and hearing ability as an initial step to determine whether or not a person is well-suited for the intervention using PictureRx. The figure (Martin et al., 2012, p. 26) displayed three pills differing slightly in color, yet very similar in size. This opens the door for error. Furthermore, was the teach-back method modified in any way to accommodate a hearing deficit?

Finally, I was pleased to know that such a promising resource is now available for use, and I attempted to enroll in PictureRx through the website designated in the article; I wanted to experience its utility firsthand. However, the actual enrollment process at http://www.picturerxcard.com seems to be disabled. Furthermore, the stated price of the PictureRx service is $19.95 per year. Perhaps information about availability and cost could be clarified for the reader in a footnote.

Again, the work of Martin et al. (2012) is to be applauded, and I look forward to further research focused on developing this intervention for medication management. It will, no doubt, benefit older adults. Thank you for taking my thoughts into consideration.

REFERENCES


Response:

We thank the reader for the questions regarding the quality improvement project and would like to clarify the following topics:

The PictureRx card featured in the article is a sample for illustration purposes only and not to be viewed as an actual patient dosing regimen.

To make the PictureRx cards in the pilot project, each participant’s medication regimen was first reconciled by a clinic pharmacist, referring to the facility’s pharmacy database and the patient’s electronic health record. The PictureRx card was then generated using a web-based interface and verified prior to patient education.

Hearing and vision were not specifically screened as part of the eligibility assessment, although the lead author, who interacted with each participant, did not note any gross deficits.

The teach-back method of communication was not modified during the project. Patients were asked to describe and explain medication intent, purpose, dosing, and any additional instructions regarding medication administration. At that time, any misunderstanding was identified and clarified.

We apologize to the reader for difficulty in accessing and enrolling in PictureRx. The technological issues have been identified and the service can be accessed at either http://www.picturerxcard.com or https://mypicturerx.com.

At the time of this writing, the cost of an account to create PictureRx cards for one patient is $19.95 per year. Group accounts, suitable for health care providers or facilities that wish to make PictureRx cards for multiple patients, are available at a discount.