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# The Essential Checklist to Improve Patient Adherence



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# Introduction

Patient adherence is key to improving health outcomes, patient experiences, and CMS star ratings, but it can be a tough nut to crack.

To start improving patient adherence across the board, providers need to understand:

- What are the root causes of non-adherence? How have these changed in recent years?
- How have providers tackled patient adherence in the past?
- Do those methods still work today?
- What evidence supports the options out there?

Patient adherence initiatives often fail to fully address the root causes of poor adherence. Successful improvement requires methods that can engage patients holistically.

## ***How?***

To start, here are six steps, based on industry-leading best practices, that you can start implementing now to improve patient adherence:

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# 1. Find Out What's Relevant to YOUR Patients

## Why It Matters:

Studying non-adherence can be tough. The same people who don't adhere to treatment plans often don't participate in research aimed at discovering why.

The few robust trials out there which do examine the causes of nonadherence show us that adherence is complex; interventions that work well for one organization might not be as effective at others.



Adherence varies widely across conditions and care settings. Cancer care sees very different adherence rates than mental health treatment, and emergency room patients often have different barriers to care than chronic care center patients.

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Understanding the basics of evidence-supported patient adherence projects (such as are provided here) is an essential starting point.

## What To Do Now:

- **Conduct a survey of your providers and administrators to discover what they see as the biggest barriers to patient adherence for YOUR patients.**

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## 2. Take Advantage of Digital Tech to Reach Patients

### Why It Matters:



Over two thirds of pharma brands are either already using an online tool to improve medication adherence, or expect to have one in place in the near future.

In short, you should expect increased competition for serving patients through online media.

The majority of patients want to be contacted through online and mobile technologies, and research supports the idea that technology can drive medication adherence.



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In 2016, [a study](#) found that mobile apps and text messages can be highly effective: 80% of participants responded to text message reminders about their medications.

Even with how widespread cell phones are, few people report receiving SMS alerts about their health; this is a key moment for healthcare providers to take advantage of changing technologies to better serve patient needs.

## What To Do Now:

- **Create a digital strategy for patient engagement.**
- **If you already have a digital strategy in place, add an additional channel through which to engage patients on multiple platforms – for example, online portals, a mobile app, and SMS messaging are all places to add medication reminders.**
- **Integrate existing online health management with patient adherence efforts.**

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## 3. Create Adherence Checklists for Providers

### Why It Matters:

Making adherence efforts both broad and specific at the same time is one of the biggest patient adherence challenges.

Often, improving average adherence rates requires using organization-wide tools to address the highly specific needs of individual patients. This can seem impossible given the wide breadth of possible concerns getting in the way of medication adherence.





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Asking providers to fill out physical, paper-based checklists during appointments has been shown to significantly improve adherence rates; [in one study](#), adding a checklist increased adherence to more than 90%.

This step adds a chance to empathize with patients, address their concerns, assess their knowledge of the treatment impact and purpose.

It also helps identify the most important barriers influencing that patient's success with the treatment, such as side effects, pill size, the convenience of picking up a prescription, or their knowledge of the treatment plan.

## What To Do Now:

- **Develop a checklist for providers to use to routinely ask about medication adherence.**
- **Train providers in creating a positive, blame-free environment through which to discuss adherence directly with patients.**

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## 4. Target Persistence, Not Just Compliance

### Why It Matters:



Persistence (or how long patients continue to adhere to treatment plans after the initial appointment) is just as important as compliance but often overlooked in adherence plans.

Even patients who initially adhere to their treatment tend to drop out over time - over the course of treatment, adherence often drops by as much as [20 percentage points](#).

This is particularly true among mental health and chronic conditions which often do not have visible symptoms. Up to 80 percent of patients [drop out](#) of their

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chronic care management plans, including medication regimens. Only [66% of HIV-positive patients](#) stay with treatment plans. Patient adherence levels for depression dip as [low as 48%](#).

Preventing patient adherence from plummeting over the course of the patient journey requires re-engaging patients.

Patients need constant, regular reminders with good information in the form or format that works best for them: text, phone, email, web, or in person.

## What To Do Now:

- **Create a system for regular reminders through email, direct mail, texting, or patient/provider portals.**
- **Increase face-to-face time between prescribers and patients to ensure questions can be answered and the first refill is as convenient as possible.**

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## 5. Make Adherence More Convenient

### Why It Matters:

Many patients report time commitments and competing life priorities as their biggest barrier to filling or refilling their meds on time.

In other words, making the activities of filling, taking, and refilling meds as convenient as possible is key to easing the burden of care on patients.

Even simple measures like providing daily pill containers or bubble-packing pills to make them easier to keep track of [have been shown to improve adherence](#).



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Minimizing the number of trips patients have to take to fill or refill their medications – either by providing prescriptions at the point of care, setting up mail-order prescriptions, or making sure all monthly prescriptions can be refilled on the same day – is also influential.

## What To Do Now:

- **Coordinate the timing of all patient medication refills to the same time each month reduce the number of trips required.**
- **Provide point-of-care prescription filling.**

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## 6. Provide Educational Resources

### Why It Matters:

Patient beliefs have been shown to be more powerful than any practical barrier when it comes to following medicine regiments.



The vast majority (76%!) of patients say pharma companies should provide more information and services to help patients manage their health.

The same survey also found gaps between the treatment tracking support and product information *received* by patients and what they would like to receive.



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However, when patients do receive services such as information and adherence tracking measures, including SMS reminders and active followup, 80% of them are satisfied with it.

Lack of awareness of treatment implications, goals, and processes is a major cause of non-adherence. Targeted educational programs and resources both improve adherence and boost patient satisfaction.

For example, patients with chronic conditions are more likely to stay adherent once they feel assured that their medication is having a positive impact on their overall well-being.

## What To Do Now:

- **Invest in educational resources for patients.**
- **Distribute educational materials to patients during appointments and afterward through online media or at prescription refill points.**



# Ready to Boost Patient Adherence?

Put what you've learned about boosting patient adherence into practice by following this simple checklist:

- Make a digital strategy for patient engagement.
- If you already have a digital strategy in place, add an additional channel through which to engage patients on multiple platforms – for example, online portals, a mobile app, and SMS messaging are all places to add medication reminders.
- Integrate existing online health management with patient adherence efforts.
- Develop a checklist for providers to use to routinely ask about medication adherence.
- Train providers in creating a positive, blame-free environment through which to discuss adherence directly with patients.
- Create a system for regular reminders through email, direct mail, texting, or patient/provider portals.



# Ready to Boost Patient Adherence?

- Increase face-to-face time between prescribers and patients to ensure questions can be answered and the first refill is as convenient as possible.
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- Coordinate the timing of all patient medication refills to the same time each month reduce the number of trips required.
- Provide point-of-care prescription filling.
- Invest in educational resources for patients.
- Distribute educational materials to patients during appointments and afterward through online media or at prescription refill points.