**Prescription Drugs: Tips for Reducing Costs** October 2019

How often has your insurance company denied payment on a medication prescribed by your doctor or it is in a tier that results in higher out of pocket cost to you? Usually this is because the medication is not on their formulary (preferred drug list) or it is only available as a brand name product. Even some older generic medications have increased drastically in price and may be assigned to a higher tier if they become a brand name product from a single source. Some medications may require a prior approval (PA) form to be completed by the prescribing doctor. Denial of coverage may still result.

Options exist that may help!

1. Always ask your doctor if a generic option is available.

* If using a generic, check the GoodRx app or website to find the pharmacy with the lowest price. (Or look for cards in the doctor’s office.) GoodRx can be used instead of insurance or Medicare. Enter the name of the medication, dosage prescribed, and quantity needed. The pharmacy with the lowest price can even have your prescription at another pharmacy transferred at your request. (Prescriptions for controlled substances cannot be transferred.)
* Ask if your pharmacy will match a lower price found elsewhere, including GoodRx price.
* If using a generic, ask your pharmacy for the cash price if you do not use insurance. In some cases, it may be less than your copay with insurance.

1. Ask your doctor if the prescription can be changed to another medication in the same class that is on formulary. You can call your insurance company, check for an online listing of the formulary, or ask your pharmacy for assistance in finding out which meds are covered.
2. Ask if a discount card is available for the brand name medication. Drug companies often provide doctors with discount cards or you can find one on the company’s website. Unfortunately, Medicare patients may not qualify. If you are eligible to use a discount card and have a high deductible, very often the difference between what you pay and what the medication actually costs will be applied to your deductible.
3. Ask the pharmacy about the price of other strengths of the medication and whether they can be cut in half. Sometimes the price of all tablet sizes will be the same. So, by cutting a higher strength in half, you will save half the cost. For example, to get a dose of 10mg, a 20 mg tablet that costs the same as a 10 mg tablet could be cut in half (if appropriate) to save money.
4. Check for availability of a patient assistance program from the manufacturer. They are often more generous than you might expect. Go online to manufacturer’s website and click on the “Patient Assistance” option. These programs are based on total household income and number of people in the household. If you meet the requirements, print the forms and fill in as much information as you can. Proof of income will be required, such as last year’s income tax records or proof of unemployment if that is the case. Your doctor will then need to complete the rest, sign, and fax to the manufacturer. Approval usually results in free drug for a year, so reapproval is necessary if needed beyond that time.

Always inform your doctor if after all of your efforts you are unable to afford to take the medication that was ordered as directed. Remember, your healthcare should be a partnership and it will function at its best when everyone is working together!

Paula MacMorran, PhD, APRN, BC