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How Much are Non-Adherent Patients Influenced by Social Media?

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One of the most important steps in the patient journey is the physicians recommendation of a particular drug, but how much weight does the physician carry today and how much sway can social media hold over the choice between adherence and non-adherence?

One of the important stops along a patient's journey is the doctor recommending a particular drug. This simple recommendation might mean switching from another drug to this new one, or simply adding it to the cocktail of medications they are already taking.

The moment the doctor recommends the drug is the moment the patient starts running through options: Listen to the doctor? Find out more information about that medication online? Many patients take to the privacy of their home computer to start the *real* conversation, which is happening online in health blogs and forums.

We decided to take a closer look at this noteworthy station in the patient journey, since it can be a crucial juncture for the patient, as well as the pharmaceutical company. Using the data we've catalogued at [Treato.com](#), we researched what patients had written in posts that mention their physician and a particular depression medication together; we then asked ourselves "what happened next."

"I am scared of trying [it] because of all the side effects."

It turns out that up to **30%** of the patient posts indicated that they decided *not* to take this physician recommended medication. Many of them pointed to information they that they had received online from their peers that helped them to make the decision. Others added to this the research they did elsewhere.

Reasons for not taking the new drug ranged from not wanting to possible encounter new side effects, not wanting to add a new, unknown element to all the drugs they are currently taking, the drug being too expensive, and deciding not to take something new since the patient was moving to a new location and didn't want to make a change.

In the patients' own voices:

"My dr. suggested [this drug] too, but I really don't want to take another drug."

"The Doctor wants to put me on [this drug]. I am scared of trying [it] because of all the side effects."

“My doc wants to add [this drug] to my meds. Anyone on it or was on it and did it help you? Side effects? I'm hesitant to take more meds.....” (and then later in the same thread) “Thanks [guys].After reading up on it I've decided to say no to the [drug]:

“Doc wanted to put me on [drug] but it was too expensive.”

In other words, just because a doctor recommends something, does not mean the patient will follow through. Often times the voices of anonymous peers online can have a stronger influence than medical personnel.

Physicians and pharmaceutical companies need to be aware of the fact that many patients do not go straight from the doctor's office to the pharmacy, and start taking the medication that very same day. A whole universe of interactions takes place outside the medical environment that can change the direction of a patient's care.

Pharmaceutical companies can help arm healthcare professionals with typical patient objections to starting a new drug – information that can be gleaned from social media conversations - and provide useful information to help their patients put it in perspective, to sort through the information they will encounter online and determine which is relevant to their situation.

Giving patients a fuller picture of what they may find online about the pros and cons of the recommended medication will help them feel secure and confident in their physician's recommendation.

Links:

[1] <http://social.eyeforpharma.com/users/gideon-mantel>