



The Rx for Our Prescription Drugs Crisis in America

Prescription drugs have been a significant part of healthcare trends for well over thirty years. Issues relating to drug addiction, formulary disparities, staggering cost increases and general naiveté within the consumer marketplace, are bringing the prescription drugs crisis to the forefront. The worst part of this problem is that everyone is to blame for the current state of the prescription drug industry and delivery system. Physicians are responsible for over-prescribing, pharmaceutical companies for price gouging and insurance companies for confusing consumers with consistently changing drug formulary or preferred drug lists. However, it is the American consumer that bears the most blame, because we tolerate these ridiculous manifestations of unethical behavior.

First of all, prescription drug patients must become prescription drug consumers. The variables in the marketplace dictate this shift in mentality. As a consumer, Americans must shop for healthcare and prescription drugs like one shops for an automobile or a television. Patients must feel comfortable inquiring with doctors regarding alternatives to medication – like exercise, lifestyle changes and dietary modifications. Far too often, patients believe that drugs prescribed by physicians are safe, without any consideration given to the potency and side effects of the drug. While many drugs are essential for maintaining one's health or ameliorating symptoms caused by debilitating diseases, many drugs deplete the human body of necessary nutrients that boost the human immune system. Additionally, many of the drugs that are now prescribed by physicians possess a high propensity for abuse and dependency.

One of the most alarming trends in America is the overdosing of prescription medications, which now kills more Americans than automobile accidents. For the last five years, prescription drug overdoses have represented more than 50% of total drug overdoses. Sales of prescription painkillers have tripled since 1999, with overdose deaths having doubled over the past decade. Many people categorize the current crisis as "Pharmageddon," and is loosely based on the catastrophe that is created when medicines produce more negative influences that better health, and when medical progress does more harm than good.

As prescription drug consumers, you should conduct a detailed due diligence effort that includes an aggressive approach in searching for the best value. The following are some examples of what consumers can do to improve their experience in the prescription drug marketplace:

- Substitute a generic prescription drug for a brand name.
- Get more prescriptions for the price.
- Buy prescription drugs online using Canadian pharmacies.
- Obtain prescription drug samples from your physician.

Generic drugs are now pervasive in the industry, and with the exception of binding agents or dyes, provide the same level of the active ingredient as the brand name medication. Consumers can counteract the inflationary trends associated with prescription drugs by migrating to generic drugs. Additionally, consumers should check and see if it may be possible to increase the strength and half the dosage. In many cases, there are minimal differences in greater strength medications and the costs for the lower strength prescriptions. An even more innovative cost effective approach to reducing the costs of medications is to consider purchasing drugs in Canada. Back in the pre-web world, this meant driving to Canada, but the process is much easier now with just the cost of shipping plus significant discounts on the same meds that are distributed in the U.S. Does this seem too good to be true? Absolutely, but when you purchase your medications from a country that controls the cost of medication to its population, drugs will be available at considerably less costs. Finally, as a patient, you should always ask for samples from your physician. Doctors are incentivized to prescribe medication, and are thoroughly supplied with samples.

Prescription drugs are an extremely volatile blend of politics, economics, legal ethics, addiction and consumer ignorance. Only we, as influential consumers, can represent our best interests when evaluating the costs of prescription drugs. It is the responsibility of all American consumers to ask questions of their physicians, pharmacies, health plans and Human Resources departments. The trend will continue to escalate with no way to reverse it, unless consumers adopt savvy tactics, and begin purchasing healthcare and prescription drugs like you would with any other product or service. Would you blindly take a drug because someone told you it would benefit your health . . . of course not!! It is our responsibility collectively to question the status quo and shift the focus to improving our health and questioning the need to self-medicate for every medical condition.

Stay tuned for a future article that will address why physicians prescribe medication so liberally.