

**POSTER ABSTRACTS**  
**8th Annual HMO Research Network Conference**  
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**Mental Health**  
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**BETTER COMMUNICATION MAY IMPROVE SSRI ADHERENCE**

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**Background:** Although current depression treatment guidelines recommend maintenance antidepressant therapy beyond the acute phase of the illness, many patients discontinue treatment prematurely. We aimed to investigate the relationship between patient-physician communication and adherence to depression treatment in a large health maintenance organization. Also explored were associations between adherence and demographics, side effects, therapeutic response and frequency of follow-up visits.

**Methods:** Telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of 401 depressed patients newly started on an SSRI; written questionnaires were completed by 137 of the primary care physicians and psychiatrists who treated them. To examine the association of patient-physicians communication with antidepressant drug use; two logistic regression models were specified and fit to the data. The main outcomes were therapy discontinuation or medication switching within 3 months after the start of SSRI therapy.

**Results:** About 21% of physicians reported not routinely giving pretreatment instructions about therapy duration. Patients who reported being told to take their medication for less than 6 months were 3.12 times more likely to discontinue therapy (95% CI: 1.21– 8.07) compared with patients who did not. Patients who discussed drug side effects with their physicians during treatment were less likely to discontinue therapy than other patients were (OR=0.49; 95% CI: 0.25-0.95). Such discussions were also associated with medication switching (OR=5.60; 95% CI: 2.31-13.60). Presence of bothersome side effects, lack of therapeutic response, and a lack of follow-up visits with patients were also associated with discontinuation of therapy.

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**Conclusions:** Our findings suggest that premature discontinuation of SSRI treatment may be reduced by more open discussions between physicians and patients about medication side effects throughout the course of treatment, clearer directions about the duration of therapy, and more frequent follow-up visits.

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