

Concurrent Session A4–3

Health Plan Members' Perceptions of Prescribing Practices

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Aims: To explore patients' understanding of how physicians decide what medications to prescribe.

Background: Medication prescribing is a large part of adult medical practice and represents an opportunity to engage patients in decisions regarding their health care. Patients are more likely to be adherent to medication when they understand the rationale for taking a specific medication. Understanding how patients view the process of prescribing medications may help patients and physicians engage in discussions that lead to improved medication recommendations from physicians and subsequent improved patient adherence with these recommendations.

Methods: 50 members from 2 health plans in Massachusetts participated in in-depth telephone interviews. Members listened to an audio-vignette of a physician prescribing a medication in the context of a cluster randomized trial. A trained interviewer posed a series of questions related to the vignette. Included were questions focused on members' beliefs about how physicians make prescribing decisions, whether they thought cost was a factor and how they thought physicians should decide on a medication recommendation. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Responses were reviewed independently by two of the authors to identify themes related to perceptions of prescribing practices.

Results: Members' perceptions of prescribing practices encompassed four major themes, including: physicians' professional knowledge, patient specific factors, external factors and recommendations for what physicians should consider when prescribing. Sub-themes suggested many members desire recommendations tailored specifically to their needs, but are also aware that external factors such as formularies may influence decision making on the part of both the physician and the patient. Some members expressed a distrust of the role of the pharmaceutical industry in influencing physicians' recommendations and a desire for a discussion of alternatives to medication.

Conclusions: Patients may desire an active role in decision making regarding their medications and transparency regarding the decision making process. Discussion of options may yield improved patient understanding, satisfaction, and possibly adherence.