

Pharma 'missing an opportunity with remote monitoring technologies'

Neena Brizmohun, Deputy Editor, SCRIP Regulatory Affairs

Pharmaceutical companies, medicine regulators and healthcare systems are missing an opportunity with remote drug monitoring and other technologies that have the potential to boost patient adherence to drugs and increase the efficacy of medicines.

"There are technologies [available] that we are not using" that could ensure patients use their drugs properly and adhere to them, said Hans-Georg Eichler, senior medical officer at the European Medicines Agency. "I know from our discussions with one or two companies" that monitoring devices are being put onto tablets, for example, Dr. Eichler said. "Why are we not making more use of that kind of technology? Why are we not letting our drugs on the market with a program which would ensure appropriate utilization and proper adherence?" he asked.

Dr. Eichler was speaking at the 26th annual Drug Information Association EuroMeeting in a debate on how to create sustainable health systems by empowering patients, making them better informed about the drugs they use and by increasing their involvement in the drug lifecycle process.

On average, only half of patients take the medicines they are prescribed, Michael

Rosenblatt, Merck & Co USA's executive vice president and chief medical officer, told delegates at the DIA meeting in Vienna, Austria. "If we could get a handle on the adherence, we could double the efficacy of every single medicine in our armamentarium," Dr. Rosenblatt said. "In the US, we estimate we can save \$300 billion a year if patients took their medicines."

Dr. Eichler called for industry and regulators to explore how to make better use of technologies that can improve patient adherence to drugs. He also highlighted the importance for healthcare systems to "invest in getting better utilization of the technologies [they] pay for."

Achieving better informed patients also calls for big improvements to be made to health literacy, according to Anna Bucsecs, former head of the Department of Pharmaceutical Affairs at the Main Association of Austrian Social Security Institutions. Health literacy is key to "enabling patients to make choices about their treatment options and to buy into their treatment and improve the effectiveness of their treatment by improving adherence," said Ms. Bucsecs. Health literacy also helps combat misinformation and pseudoscience, Ms.

Bucsics added. "There's a lot to be done with health literacy... the question is who is going to do it and how are we going to go about it?"

Info to patients "for most part incomprehensible"

The information "we give to patients for the most part is incomprehensible", Dr. Rosenblatt commented. But, he added, "We found, for instance, that simple changes in language can change the comprehension about a medicine or illness from very low to over 90%." "This is the most powerful single thing we can do. The patient will take the medicine."

The Merck executive added: "You may not appreciate how narrowly constrained [companies] are in the amount and types of information we can deliver to patients." Even telling patients about the results of clinical trials can be construed as promotional and therefore illegal.

Regarding increasing patient involvement during drug development, Dr. Eichler believes more is needed on this front. "We should involve patients more at the early stages of development," he said, noting that patients could help companies design clinical trials and "tell us what's important to them."

Developments for involving patients in the decision-making process for drug licensing or coverage have started. However, Dr. Eichler remarked: "I think we can do a much better job here than we currently do."

Dr. Rosenblatt also pointed out that patients are likely to have a different view on the benefits they would expect from a drug and the risks they would be prepared to take, compared with that of a company, regulator or healthcare system.

How to involve and inform patients was a key theme at the DIA EuroMeeting this year. As Dr. Rosenblatt said, "The best health system is one that is informed by patients and the best patients in that health system are patients who are informed."