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"Pharmaceutical Manufacturers' Indigent Drug Programs"

Your Life Your Health

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The recent presidential campaign has highlighted one of the most pressing problems in healthcare delivery. This problem, like most is good news/bad news. The problem is access to the drugs needed to treat common and uncommon illnesses. The good news is that American ingenuity inconjunction with scientific advancement has developed more excellent medicines than at any time in the history of man. Conditions which only a few years ago were uniformly lethal are now either curable or treatable. That's good news. The bad news is that the development, manufacture and distribution costs for these drugs are often very, very high. This leads to the availability of drugs which, because of their cost, are not accessible to everyone who needs them.

The solution to this problem is complex. Obviously, one solution is the pooling of risk, which is the foundation of all government-sponsored or funded programs. The idea is that everyone pays something toward medications so that those who need them have access at a cost which they can afford. The problem is that with most government programs safe guards are either not in place or are difficult to put into place to prevent the escalation of costs at the expense of the people who are paying the bills.

Also, because government-sponsored and/or funded programs create an entitlement mentality, people often begin to demand that more and more be done for them, as they accept less and less responsibility for their own lives. This leads to those who need medications spending their available resources on tobacco, alcohol, excessive fatty foods, etc. -- all of which increase the cost of their healthcare -- while demanding that others pay for the medications which they need. Sometimes these medications are needed because of a person's own self-destructive habits.

Public policy in healthcare delivery must never take away personal responsibility. While public policy must address access to medications, even of those whose need is created by willful negative behavior, that policy must never make the recipient a ward of the state -- that is, one who believes that all of their needs will be or should be met by the government. While no one in America should have to choose between buying food or medications, there are choices which should and must be made. For instance, at Southeast Texas Medical Associates, we have let all of our patients know that we will not treat any patient who is on a managed care plan who smokes. We are happy to participate in efforts to decrease the cost of healthcare by reducing the cost of "going to the doctor," but we are not willing to do that while patients spend \$100 to \$500 per month on tobacco products. This is simply one way in which we require the patient to be responsible for their own healthcare cost.

How then can people who truly need help get medications? One of the ways is through Pharmaceutical Manufacturers' Indigent Drug Programs. Almost all pharmaceutical companies have such programs. Most of the time, the physician must apply to the program on the patient's behalf. But, once again, the patient can accept the responsibility for making it as easy as possible for the physician's office, already overburden with paper work, to do this for the patient. In this way, the patient can collaborate with the physician in obtaining the medications which the patient needs and which the patient cannot afford.

If you need assistance with your medication, discuss that with your healthcare provider. She/he can often help you with samples which the pharmaceutical companies generously give to patients. If samples are not available, you can apply for free medications from the drug company. The companies listed below have indigent drug programs. Their telephone number, addresses and some of the medications which they make available on their program are also listed.

Every company has different forms and different requirements, but remember, you take responsibility for getting the form, filling it out and then giving it to your health care provider for signature. It's your responsibility, assume it, and you will benefit both financially and emotionally.

If you do not qualify, or if your drugs are not available through the company, SETMA has applications for The Medicine Program, P. O. Box 520, Doniphan, MO 63935-0520 (Phone 1-573-996-7300) where you can make application to get your medications free. There is a \$5 processing fee per medication which you request through this program. You can get one of these forms by either dropping by SETMA's office, even if you are not a SETMA patient, or by calling The Examiner.

Together we can help you acquire the medications which you need. If you will do your part -- stop unhealthy habits, start healthy ones, take responsibility for your own health -- your healthcare provider will be more than happy to help you. And remember, it's Your Life and it's Your Health!

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