Pearls

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10 tips for working with a drug formulary

Medicare, private HMOs, and Veterans Affairs medical centers justify drug formularies by claiming lower co-payments and insurance premiums and cost-effective health care without diminishing quality. But some physicians believe having to prescribe from a list interferes in medical practice and reduces clinical autonomy.

You may view having to request a consult as a hassle when you wish to prescribe a nonformulary drug. A thoroughly researched nonformulary request can expedite the process, however.

5 STRATEGIES FOR NONFORMULARY REQUESTS

1 Reference evidence-based information to support your request.

2 Document your patient's drug trials, dosages, clinical response failure, and adverse effects to expedite review of nonformulary requests.

3 Ask the patient about family history of response to a medication. Such pharmacogenetic data may predict response in first-degree relatives and support a nonformulary request.

4 Document pharmacokinetic or pharmacodynamic interactions between the formulary drug and other medications the patient is taking.

5 List known interactions with foods and diseases.

5 TIPS FOR PRACTICING WITHIN A FORMULARY

Physicians are not alone in being leery of drug formularies. Patients encouraged by direct-to-consumer advertising ask for the newest—and often most expensive medications—may share that wariness.[1] To help us work within the restrictions of a drug formulary system and provide appropriate patient care, we suggest the following helpful strategies:

1 Understand that formularies are well intentioned and highly calculated. Lists are updated frequently to represent physicians' and other experts' clinical judgment on the use of safe, appropriate, and cost-effective medications, therapies, and health products that best serve patients.[2]

2 Address patient concerns to help them accept and adhere to prescribed formulary drugs. Emphasize that a medication's cost does not determine its efficacy.

3 Remember that your duty to provide proper treatment supersedes cost considerations.

4 Ask for a physician review when your request for a nonformulary drug is denied.

5 Use nonpharmacologic treatments such as sleep hygiene, cognitive-behavioral therapy, or relaxation techniques when possible. This approach reduces polypharmacy and keeps costs low.

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References

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