

Ask the Pharmacist

What is e-prescribing and how can it benefit me?

Electronic prescribing (e-prescribing) is when your doctor transmits your prescription electronically to the pharmacy. By replacing handwritten prescriptions, e-prescribing virtually eliminates medication errors caused by illegible handwriting. E-prescribing can improve patient safety, streamline prescription processes, and reduce healthcare costs.

According to the Institute of Medicine, each year preventable medication errors tragically result in 7,000 deaths and 1.5 million injuries.¹ Preventable errors include items such as inaccurate dosages, incorrect drugs, and complications due to drug interactions.

A physician “wired” for e-prescribing uses a desktop computer, handheld device, or personal computer tablet to electronically acquire and transmit the patient’s medication information. The e-prescribing system sends the patient’s medication information to the physician in a unique one-time transaction.

As your doctor is writing an electronic prescription, the e-prescribing system alerts him or her to any potential adverse drug reaction (drug-to-drug interactions or drug allergies). In addition, e-prescribing gives the physician the patient’s medication history, health insurance information, and the health plan’s formulary. If, as the physician is filling

out the prescription, there are concerns regarding the use or cost of the medicine, the patient can discuss them with the physician while still in the examination room.

Once any issues have been resolved, the physician will send the prescription to the pharmacy—either the patient’s local pharmacy or a mail-order pharmacy, such as Medco.

Doctors benefit from e-prescribing because the technology saves time, since they receive fewer phone calls and faxes to clarify what was prescribed or deal with various health plan coverage issues. In a recent survey of 500 physician practices using e-prescribing in the Detroit metropolitan area, more than 70 percent of respondents said they were very satisfied with e-prescribing technology.²

To encourage more physicians to adopt e-prescribing, the U.S. government is offering increased reimbursements to doctors who electronically transmit prescriptions for Medicare patients. In 2012, the government will begin to reduce its reimbursements to physicians who do not use e-prescribing.

Because patient safety is its number-one concern, Medco, your health plan’s pharmacy care provider, is working on many different fronts to promote e-prescribing.

References:

1. Report brief: Preventing medication errors. Institute of Medicine. <http://www.iom.edu/Object.File/Master/35/943/medication%20errors%20new.pdf>. Accessed January 15, 2009.

2. Prescription for change: New survey shows e-prescribing connecting with its biggest skeptics... physicians. Medco Health Solutions, Inc. [news release]. “February 27, 2008. <http://medco.mediaroom.com/index.php?s=43&item=301>. Accessed January 15, 2009.