



No. 60 Adherence to

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Title: **Adherence to Therapy**

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We always start treatment with the expectation that the patient will take the medication according to the directions that we prescribe. Unfortunately, at times patients do not take the medication as advised or stop taking it all together. When this occurs we call it non-adherence. It is hard to believe that patients may not follow up with a plan to make them better. However, it is important for us to sit down with the patient understand why it happened.

There are several different reasons that patients may be non-adherent with medications and/or treatment plans. First, proper consideration was not given to the lifestyle and goals of the patient. Sometimes, as doctors we may think that we know what you need but it is essential that we talk with you to make sure we know how we can best help you. For example, providing a patient who likes to travel with a medication that requires weekly visit to the doctor's office may place unrealistic expectations for adherence from the start. Given the number of different therapies available it is important to make sure you communicate with your doctor any reason a particular medication might not work with your lifestyle and discuss alternatives. Even the best medication will not work if it can't be taken. The North American Consortium of Pediatric ITP (ICON) recently looked at how the two thrombopoietin (TPO)-receptor agonists are being used in clinical practice. We wondered if response rates in clinical practice would be different between the two medications due to the differences in how they are given. One TPO-receptor agonist, romiplostim) is given by subcutaneous injection once per week (in the US, the injection must be in a doctor's office). The other (eltrombopag) is a daily pill, which requires some restrictions on what the patient can eat and drink in the two hours before and after taking the pill. We questioned if these differences would impact patient adherence and lead to reduced responses. What we found however was that the drugs worked almost the same, likely because patients selected which drug would work best for their schedule in a conversation with their doctor. For example, I have a 10 year-old patient who clearly and honestly stated that he would not take a pill everyday and that was not an option for treatment. If these items are considered early on then there is greater chance for adherence and successful therapy.

Second, is a lack of understanding of the purpose of the medication. It is key for doctors to ensure that patients are educated about the reason a medication is being prescribed. Additionally, as a patient you should not take any medication if you do not understand what you are taking it for and what to expect while on the medication. A lack of understanding of the importance of medications can often make them seem unnecessary and thus reduce the likelihood of successful adherence.

Lastly, medication side effects can impact a patient's ability to stay on medication. Sometimes medications can cause side effects that appear to the patient to be worse than the actual disease. Dr. Jim George and his colleagues at University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center conducted a study where they asked patients and doctors about symptoms of both ITP and corticosteroids. While the doctors felt like bleeding symptoms were more bothersome to patients than the side-effects of corticosteroids, the patients actually reported being much more troubled by side effects of corticosteroids than they were about a risk for bleeding. It is therefore critical to discuss any and all side effects that you experience with your doctor, especially if it might cause you to choose to not take it anymore.

Open discussion with your physician will ensure that the treatments you are prescribed will fit with your lifestyle, that you understand the goals of the medication, and that you are aware of any possible side effects. Through this kind of communication there is greater likelihood that you and your doctor will choose a treatment course that is easy for you to adhere to and will make you better.