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Helping patients to adhere to their eyecare recommendations

Fact sheet 5

Adherence describes the extent to which a patient follows the healthcare plan agreed between themselves and their practitioner. It is distinct from compliance (which is the extent to which the patient follows advice given by their practitioner) as it involves the patient actively agreeing to follow a particular healthcare regimen, and this will often include discussion between the practitioner and the patient to tailor the regimen to suit the lifestyle needs of the patient.

Despite involving the patient in developing healthcare plans, non-adherence is a big problem: the World Health Organisation estimate that only 50% of medical advice is likely to be taken up by patients. When patients don't follow advice from their practitioners, this can lead to a lower quality of life and wasted health resources. This is also very important when patients do not follow the advice given by their optometrist: their non-adherence could lead to a reduction in the quality of the vision they enjoy, or even blindness.

This fact sheet describes what optometrists can do to help patients adhere to the eyecare recommendations they receive.

Why do patients not follow medical advice?

- **They don't remember the advice they were given:** patients recall as little as 20% of what they are told in medical consultations
- **They don't understand what they have been asked to do:** sometimes the instructions that patients receive are hard to follow or difficult to understand
- **They don't feel able to follow the instructions:** they do not have the skills to carry out the instructions they were given, or they lack confidence that they can do so
- **They don't agree with the advice they were given:** they may not agree with the practitioner's diagnosis or the treatment plan
- **They might have different treatment goals to the practitioner:** while the practitioner may want one outcome, the patient may want another
- **They don't understand the consequences of non-adherence:** they may underestimate the severity of what could happen if they don't adhere

What can the optometrist do to help patients adhere?

- Repeat important pieces of information and advice several times. People are more likely to recall information that they hear at the start and the end of a consultation, so summarise key points at the end of the consultation. If possible, provide written information that is clear and easy to understand
- Try to give instructions simply and clearly, and don't use jargon or technical language. Check that patients understand what they are agreeing to do, and encourage them to ask questions. See Box 1 for more information on giving clear instructions
- Ensure that patients feel confident that they are able to carry out the advice and instructions, and provide help and support where appropriate
- Explore the patient's perceptions of their eyecare regime, and agree any eyecare and treatment plan with them. Agree the eyecare or treatment plan with them. Be prepared to explore ways of adapting the plan to meet their needs
- If there are potential negative consequences of non-adherence, e.g. infections if people don't follow contact lens cleaning instructions, then ensure that the patient is made aware of them

Box 1: Giving clear instructions

Speak clearly at a relaxed pace

Use plain English

Use short sentences

Don't use complex grammar

Don't use double negatives

Written instructions should use a clear font size, and have a good contrast between the colour of the ink and the colour of the paper

Don't use technical terms or jargon