Pharm Team

How to work your pharmacist

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If your druggist offers only a bag of pills and a chair to wait in until they're ready, it's time to shop around. HIV requires a full health-care team, and your pharmacist is a key player. Here are five features you can expect:

SPECIALIST EFFECTS. "You need someone with advanced and up-to-date knowledge about HIV care," says Michael Lim, RPh, pharmacist and manager of Statscript in San Francisco's Castro district. That means a specialist, "not somebody who dabbles."

DANGER RANGER. Meds—and supplements!—can interact and cause trouble, so get 'em all at one pharmacy, where they "know the specifics of all the drugs and interactions," Lim says. Toronto pharma star Zahid Somani, RPh, had a customer who was starting Reyataz, unaware that "his Losec [a med to reduce stomach acid] could have made the Reyataz ineffective. I got his doc to switch him to something safer," Somani says.

ADHERENCE HELP. A good pharmacist can help you manage your meds' less-than-pleasant side effects and suggest creative ways to do the take-all-your-pills-every-time drill. Just ask.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Your privacy is paramount—"whether here in the Castro or out in Butte, Montana, you don't need somebody shouting 'Here's your Combivir' across the floor," Lim says. Look for a consultation area safe from gossip.

PAY PAL. If you depend on ADAP, Lim says, "Choose a pharmacy where all the staff can work it. If just one person knows the paperwork, they might be away when you need them." And if your coverage has gaps, find someone like Somani, who says he "tries to work around financial constraints to get people the drugs they need." Rx-cellent.

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