Drug Costs Can Drive Down Adherence

About one in seven people living with HIV use strategies to save on drug costs, including skipping doses.

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One in seven people with HIV use strategies to cut their medication costs, and about 1 in 15 skip doses of their drugs as a means of saving money, according to a recent study.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention researchers, led by epidemiologist Linda Beer, PhD, analyzed data from the 2016 to 2017 Medical Monitoring Project on nearly 4,000 people with HIV taking prescription drugs.

The study considered six cost-saving strategies people might have used over the previous 12 months related to any type of prescription drug. These included asking a doctor for a lower-cost medication, buying prescription drugs from another country, using alternative therapies, skipping doses, taking less medication and delaying filling a prescription because of cost.

Fourteen percent of U.S. adults living with HIV used any type of strategy to save on medication costs, and 7% reported nonadherence related to cutting costs.

Among those reporting cost-related nonadherence, 64% had a fully suppressed viral load at their last test, and 55% did so at all their tests during the previous 12 months, compared with a respective 76% and 68% of those who did not report nonadherence related to cost.

“Reducing barriers to the Ryan White AIDS Drug Assistance Program and Medicaid coverage, in addition to reducing medication costs for people with private insurance, might help to increase adherence to [antiretroviral treatment] due to cost concerns,” says Beer. “This could contribute to improved viral suppression rates and other health outcomes for people with HIV.”

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