

Study: Doctors' texts can prod patients to take drugs

By Shefali Luthra
Kaiser Health News

A spoonful of sugar may make the medicine go down, but that's hardly useful if a patient doesn't remember to take it in the first place.

According to a new analysis, there could be a possible solution: text message reminders sent to patients' phones from the doctor. Researchers found that texts could push people to do better at adhering to their drug regimens and, along the way, save the health system a fair bit of money.

The paper, published Monday in JAMA Internal Medicine, reviewed data from 16 studies, all of which explored whether mobile telephone text reminders sent to patients made them more likely to take their medicine. In total, the studies included in this meta-analysis tracked the behavior of almost 3,000 chronically ill patients, looking at how well they complied with medication regimens, and found the text messages had an impact.

Across the various studies, patients went from having a 50 percent rate of following through on medication to a nearly 68 percent rate.



On its face, that looks like quite a jump. But readers should view the findings with a degree of caution, the authors noted. They pointed out that several of the studies they examined relied on participants to self-report how faithful they were with their prescription drugs. Since people often misremember or misreport this kind of information, that measure isn't always the most reliable. In addition, the studies included in the analysis lasted on average about three months, though chronically ill people take their medications for years. Thus, the studies may not have accounted for whether patients eventually experience text message fatigue and consequently paid the reminders less attention. If that is the case, then text messages could initially be effective but, over time, lose their power in helping people take medicine.

"It's one way to think just sending messages is simple, and people will like it," said Robby Nieuwlaat, an assistant professor of epidemiology and biostatistics at Canada's McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. "But they can also be irritating at some point if you don't need it."

That could be a factor, said Laurie Buis, an assistant profes-

sor of family medicine at the University of Michigan, who has also researched the subject. But it's clear people want such reminders. "There is a lot of consumer demand for these types of interventions."

The paper also compares studies from a host of countries. Two were based in the United States, but others were conducted in China, Spain and Kenya. Some texted patients every day. Others messaged them every week. Still others used strategies like aligning a text message with timing for when patients should take particular doses. Some sent patients reminders that had been personalized. Others didn't. Those differences could introduce variables that made the texts more or less effective, or they could have introduced other considerations for which the analysis doesn't account.

Taking medicine is, of course, important — especially for people with chronic conditions, like diabetes or high blood pressure. Chronically ill people are also often on multiple medications, which can be hard to track and easy to forget about.

That means if text reminders do work, they have "the potential to prevent major clinical events such as heart attacks,

strokes and premature death," study co-author Clara Chow wrote in an email. Chow directs the cardiovascular division of the George Institute for Global Health in Sydney, Australia.

Not taking medicine isn't just bad for your health — it's expensive, too. Experts estimate patients not complying with their drug regimens cost the United States between \$100 billion and \$289 billion each year. If text reminders do prove effective, they could offer an easy, low-cost tool to address that problem.

"Text-message based interventions can be delivered at low-cost, they can be easily scaled with computerized message management systems," Chow said. "So they are likely to be cost effective in health care."

But the issue of who pays for the text messaging also raises questions.

Texts are cheap to send, but they still aren't free, Nieuwlaat said. He wrote a commentary analyzing the study. As researchers further probe how helpful they could be, doctors and patients need to think about who would pay for that kind of service and if it's worth the investment.

Explore Healthcare Careers



Unemployment rates may still be high and the opportunities out there in specific careers might be waning, but there is one job sector that may be promising – healthcare. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor indicate that 3.2 million jobs will be created by 2018 in the healthcare industry. Other forecasters say that with an aging population who will provide the demand for healthcare workers, jobs in the health sector make sense as a stable career option. Check out the opportunities listed below!

HEALTHSOUTH Western Hills Regional Rehabilitation Hospital

HealthSouth Western Hills is a 50-bed inpatient rehabilitation hospital that offers comprehensive inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation services designed to return patients to leading active and independent lives.

Western Hills is currently looking for:

- Registered Nurse – Full-time/Nights and PRN
- Rehabilitation Nursing Technicians/CNAs – PRN
- Occupational Therapist – PRN
- Speech Pathologist – PRN
- Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant – PRN
- Cook – PRN

Apply online at www.healthsouth.com/careers.

HealthSouth Western Hills Rehabilitation Hospital
3 Western Hills Dr.
Parkersburg, WV 26105
304-420-1300 or 800-242-1301
Email: julie.swanson@healthsouth.com
EOE

Diagnostic Cardiac Ultrasonographer CAMC Health System

CAMC has an immediate opening for a **Cardiac Ultrasonographer!**

- The responsibilities of this position will be to perform diagnostic cardiac sonography at a technician and professional level.
- The cardiac ultrasonographer must exercise independent judgment, initiative, and ingenuity in insuring quality images and pertinent information for diagnosis by the interpreting physician.
- Candidates must be registered or registry-eligible.
- Registered, Experienced Candidates are preferred.
- We offer an attractive and flexible benefits package as well as a competitive salary and promotional opportunities!

Apply now by visiting our website at www.camc.org

For inquiries, please email lisa.george@camc.org

CAMC will conduct a drug test and background check on all new hires
Equal Opportunity Employer

Registered Nurse Experienced

CAMC Health System

CAMC Hospitals are seeking Experienced full-time and Weekender RN's to join their highly skilled teams at:

GENERAL
MEMORIAL
WOMEN & CHILDREN'S
and
TEAYS VALLEY HOSPITAL locations!

Qualified candidates will be licensed to practice nursing in WV and have 1+ years' RN experience.

Apply TODAY! Visit our web site at www.camc.org/nurses



Charleston Area Medical Center

camc.org/careers

CAMC offers a competitive compensation and benefit package. All new hires will complete a background check and drug screen.
EOE

CASCI™ NOW HIRING

Customer Service Representatives



"CASCI is family oriented and really cares about their employees. I am truly excited to be part of this organization. At CASCI, I am a person, not a number."
- Chris Saldívar, CSR since 2012

Capital Area Services Company, LLC (CASCI) a division of one of the nations largest health care insurance organizations, is recruiting talent for its Charleston WV location. If you are committed to excellence, demonstrate strong analytical and communication skills, and thrive in a fast paced environment, we want you for our team! CASCI is rated in the top 100 employers for West Virginia.

Join a company who values its employees and provides the following benefits:

- Competitive wages
- 10 week paid training course
- Competitive medical, prescription, dental and vision
- 401k
- Tuition Reimbursement
- Monthly and Annual Incentive pay
- 10 Company Paid Holidays
- Up to 3 weeks of Paid Time Off
- On-site fitness room and free fitness classes

The right candidate should possess a minimum of a high school diploma or equivalency, (college or technical certifications are preferred) good computer skills coupled with a great work ethic and attitude.

Visit www.CASCIcareers.com to apply today!

CASCI is an Equal Opportunity (EEO) employer. It is the policy of the Company to provide equal employment opportunities to all qualified applicants without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, age, protected veteran or disabled status, or genetic information.