

Improving Metabolic Testing for Members Prescribed Anti-psychotics for Management of Schizophrenia

The use of atypical antipsychotics is becoming more common for treatment for schizophrenia. One of the key side effects of these drugs is their metabolic side effects, which have become more clearly defined over the years. Research shows that members taking these medications are at an increased risk of developing diabetes and cardiovascular conditions. Although from what we have seen psychiatrists are the physicians most often prescribing these medications, there is a growing trend that pediatricians, family practice physicians, internists, and neurologists also prescribe atypical antipsychotics with increasing regularity.

Despite the increased use of these medications, the overall rate of screening for metabolic disorders in members prescribed atypical antipsychotics remains low. There are several possible reasons for this low rate of screening.

One of the main reasons screening is low is because multiple providers are managing care for the member and there is a lack of coordination between these providers. The behavioral health practitioners maybe the ones prescribing the antipsychotics, but it is the primary care practitioners who may have to order the A1c and LDL test. In many instances the primary care providers are not aware that their members use atypical antipsychotics and hence are not ordering the test.

As a practitioner, you can help your members stay in compliance. At the time of the initial visit:

- Ask the member if they have received an A1c or LDL test in the last 12 months.
- Order the test for any member who has not taken the test.
- Make sure your member understands why these tests are important.
- If your office does not do the test, then make sure you educate your members to see a provider who can order the test for them.
- Send treatment plans to other relevant providers (i.e. primary care practitioners) who are relevant in managing the members care. Members may be seeing other behavioral health providers and primary care practitioners for their follow up visit.
- It is very important to share the member's treatment plan with other providers who may be managing the members follow up care so that they can also stress the importance of getting a metabolic test.
- The lack of ongoing follow up and education can increase the likelihood of non-compliance.
- Remember, spending 10 – 15 additional minutes addressing the above points with the member can go a long way in ensuring that your members are following the appropriate plan of care.