Osteoporosis: The Inside Story

Up to 50% of Osteoporosis Patients Stop Their Treatment. \(^1,^2,^3\) Do you know why?

“Healthcare professionals managing osteoporosis are faced with a serious problem. Although we have the means to help patients live with long-term conditions and medication to effectively manage osteoporosis, up to half of patients stop their treatment after only a year, leaving them susceptible to fractures and increasing their risk of death. Through our frequent contact with patients, we have an important role to play in empowering people with osteoporosis and providing them with the necessary support to tackle this critical issue.”

Ingeborg Best, Specialist Osteoporosis Nurse

Although evidence suggests many osteoporosis patients stop taking their medication, research shows many healthcare professionals are unsure exactly why their patients discontinue treatment.\(^4\) Encouraging patients to talk about their osteoporosis management and establishing a strong partnership may help patients to feel more in control of their disease.

Nurses play a key role in the detection, prevention and management of osteoporosis. The core skills of critical thinking, effective communication and collaboration with other healthcare professionals enable nurses to bring together the needs of patients and the aims of osteoporosis management. Whether at first diagnosis or in consultation with existing patients, proactively raising the topic of adherence will help patients feel comfortable discussing this issue and encourage them to talk about why they may find staying on treatment a challenge.

When a patient has information about their treatment, they are more likely to be adherent. When discussing medication, it is worthwhile advising patients on how long to take their treatment, possible side-effects and when they are likely to experience treatment benefits.

Taking steps to increase adherence rates will not only improve clinical outcomes and patient quality of life, it will also minimise the financial burden caused by wasted medication and the cost of treating fractures. Research shows there are a number of common reasons why patients stop taking their medication. Talking to patients about these contributing factors is a good way to initiate a conversation around adherence difficulties, identify those who may be having trouble staying on treatment, and refer them to their doctor so they can discuss their needs and treatment options available.
PATIENT INSIGHTS
The underlying causes of non-adherence

1. “My medicine isn’t compatible with my lifestyle”
   - Two thirds of women say their osteoporosis medication interferes with their lives in some way.
   - Of those who miss or stop their treatment:
     - 40% have to have breakfast at a different time on treatment days
     - 31% have to get up earlier on treatment days
     - 47% are more likely to take a medication that interferes less with their lifestyle

2. “I have to put up with frequent side-effects”
   - 21% of women who miss or stop their treatment say this is due to the side-effects.

3. “I find it hard to take so many tablets at the same time”
   - 18% of women miss or stop their treatment because they have too many medications to take.
   - 87% of women who stop taking their osteoporosis treatment still keep taking their other medications.

4. “I’m not sure if my medicine is really working”
   - 75% of women say they don’t know for certain if their treatment is working or not.
   - 11% of women miss or stop their treatment because they can’t see the benefits.

5. “I would have preferred to talk about the treatment options available to me”
   - Only half of women feel involved in decisions taken about their treatment.
   - Taking account of patients’ preferences and beliefs improves adherence.

6. “I broke a bone whilst I was taking my treatment”
   - Many women who experience a fracture lose faith in taking medication.
   - It is important for women to stay on treatment long-term in order to experience the benefits of their medication.

7. “I don’t like taking medication; I’d rather take a natural remedy instead”
   - Some patients need reassurance before taking long-term medication.
   - Medical treatments for osteoporosis have been shown to reduce the risk of fractures by over 50%.

References
5. Survey of 1500 PMO patients across Europe, research conducted by IQI International Ltd, 2007. Sponsored by Roche/GSK.

KEY POINTS FOR NURSES
Suggested opening questions

1. Question 1
   - Do you find taking your osteoporosis medicine makes it more difficult to do the things you would like to do?

2. Question 2
   - a) Do you find you get side-effects after taking your medicine?
   - b) How much do these side-effects affect your day-to-day life?

3. Question 3
   - a) Do you find having more than one medicine to take can be difficult?
   - b) Would it be helpful if you had fewer medicines to take?

4. Question 4
   - a) Do you know how your medicine is helping protect your bones?
   - b) Do you know how effective your treatment is at protecting you from broken bones?

5. Question 5
   - Is there any more information I can give you about your medicine?

6. Question 6
   - Do you know how long you need to stay on treatment to protect your bones?

7. Question 7
   - Do you know medical treatments can help protect your bones from fracture?