Timothy W. Cutler, Pharm.D.
Assistant Clinical Professor of Pharmacy, UCSF School of Pharmacy
Clinical Pharmacist, Mercy Medical Group
3400 Data Drive
Rancho Cordova, Ca. 95670
Ph: 916-379-2763
Email: tim.cutler@chw.edu

Mercy Medical Group is a 160 provider physician group in the Sacramento area. There are 8 clinic sites with 60,000 managed lives (5,000 of these are Medicare Advantage patients). Traditionally, the pharmacy department has worked on utilization management within the group. The department also developed educational programs focused on physician detailing to ensure cost effective medication practices.

In November 2000, Mercy Medical Group (MMG) learned that the pharmacy benefit for one of its major Medicare Advantage HMO plans would be reduced to a "generic-only" pharmacy benefit. This would be a drastic change that would affect approximately 5,000 MMG senior members. Due to these startling revelations, MMG developed a plan that would educate senior consumers and physicians about cost-effective prescribing. It is from this plan that the Pharmacist Review to Increase Cost-Effectiveness (PRICE) Clinic was conceptualized, developed and implemented.

The PRICE Clinic is a pharmacist-run outpatient clinic designed to help seniors obtain needed medications at an affordable price. The clinic is conducted at all eight Mercy primary care locations either weekly or bimonthly. Patients can access the clinic, free of charge, either through self-referral or referral from their primary care physician (PCP). Patients are scheduled for 30-minute clinic visits with the pharmacist in the same office as their PCP. This provides convenience for patients and allows access to medical records and their PCP when consultations and medication changes are necessary.

Providing individual medication therapy management within the provider group setting turned out to be the most effective way to influence our provider prescribing habits. This clinic was not protocol driven and involved a team approach where the patient, provider and pharmacist worked together to develop a patient specific plan. In fact, our providers were extremely receptive to our recommendations accepting 97% of our suggestions. During the first 4 years of PRICE clinic, 2000 patients have been seen taking an average of 6 medications per patient. Patients in PRICE clinic have realized an average of 50% cost savings through such interventions as pill-splitting, therapeutic interchanges, deletion of therapeutic duplications, generic substitutions, the use of mail-order pharmacies, and enrollment in pharmaceutical industry-sponsored Patient-Assistance Programs (PAPs). Perhaps more importantly, these appointments give patients the opportunity to have a clinical pharmacist evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of their pharmacologic therapy. Beyond direct cost savings, we have also seen very high patient and physician satisfaction with our services. There has been a 90% retention rate for those patients seen in PRICE clinic as compared to a 70% retention rate for Medicare Advantage patients overall.

With the passage of MMA 2003, Congress sought to create a drug benefit that not only improved access to drugs but also improved the use of medications to result in better patient outcomes and lower overall health care costs. The mechanism identified in MMA 2003 to address improved use of medications is Medication Therapy Management Services (MTMS). Essentially, health care providers will be reimbursed for their ability to manage medications as a chronic disease. Those providers (pharmacists, nurses, physicians and physician extenders) who participate in MTMS are required to improve adherence, assess the health status of the patient, decrease out-of-pocket medication costs, coordinate the care of the patient and improve the patient's quality of life. It is clearly stated in MMA 2003 that those individuals performing MTMS must use an individualized approach and that population-based models (utilizing form letters, formularies, therapeutic substitution, etc.) will not meet the intent of MTMS.

Although MTMS is the term used in MMA 2003 to describe medication management of the elderly, the same approach may be used in any patient with chronic disease. Specifically, a comprehensive program that identifies solutions to medication-related problems in chronic disease management is the best way to improve the care of individuals with long-term medical problems. The clinical pharmacists of PRICE clinic are currently using this MTMS framework to help manage medication therapy for patient members of MMG. The new PRICE model will incorporate the cost and care-based aspects of MTMS.

Healthcare is traditionally performed compartmentally and comprehensive medication management requires a team approach that involves the pharmacist, provider and patient (or caregiver). Replication of this model will require adaptation to your practice setting. This model is ideal for physician group practices, however, there are aspects of this model that can be adapted to the community pharmacy setting. The key is to find the niche that allows patient and provider "buy-in" to build your practice around.