Helping patients with adherence: dexterity issues

The latest in this series of articles on helping patients to use their medicines correctly considers the support you can provide to those with dexterity issues, most commonly as a consequence of arthritis.

Much is made of the huge amount of NHS money spent on medicines that are not taken, and rightly so. However, in a proportion of these cases, the patient wants to take their medication but is unable to do so. This is often the case for those with arthritis of the hands who may struggle to open product packaging or manipulate containers such as dropper bottles and inhalers. Dispensary staff need to be aware of some of the modifications they can make or offer in order to help patients overcome these issues.

**Blister-packed medicines** can be impenetrable to some, but pill presses (sometimes known as poppers or punches) are available to purchase that can help with blister packaging. An example can be viewed [here](#). Some medicines can also be supplied in a non-blister packed version, and wholesalers will be able to advise on any products they stock in such bulk packs.

**Liquids and loose tablets and capsules** are usually supplied in bottles with child-resistant closures, requiring a level of strength and dexterity that some patients don’t have. Bottle opening devices such as the Medigrip can be helpful, otherwise you can offer non-childproof lids, some of which have ‘wings’ that can be grasped to make the twisting action easier. Supplying a larger container than would usually be used can also make a difference. Remember that products packaged in bottles in this way lack the reminder aspect of calendar packs, and using a chart can provide a useful memory prompt and dosing record.

**Eye drops** can be fiddly at the best of times, but the small size of the bottle makes them very difficult to manipulate for individuals with stiff hands. Getting someone else to administer the drops is an ideal solution, but if this is not feasible, an eye drop dispenser device such as Opticare Arthro or Autodrop can help. Such devices can be purchased or prescribed.

**Inhalers** rely on dexterity and coordination for the patient to gain the full benefit of the medicine they contain. Inhaler aids help patients actuate their device – whether by pressing, twisting or
gripping — and are available free of charge directly from manufacturers. Examples include the Haleraid and Turbohaler Grip.

**Topical preparations** such as creams, gels and ointments can be made easier to use by employing a tube squeezer device. The tube is either placed in the device and then a key on the side turned, or pushed upwards as if between the blades of a pair of scissors to squeeze out the contents. Some products are supplied with a key, making the preparation easier and more economical to use.

**Lotions**, which are runnier in formulation, can be spread using a special applicator comprised of a long wooden handle and a replaceable sponge. An example can be seen [here](#).

**Hosiery** manufacturers can supply devices to ease the often tortuous process of putting on compression stockings. Examples include Scholl’s Fitting Socklet and Activa’s Acti-glide.

**Injectable medicines** such as insulin can be prescribed as prefilled pens, rather than as vials and hypodermic syringes or as cartridges and prefillable pen devices. These only require a simple button press once the dose has been dialled in.

Remember:

- Arthritis sufferers tend to be older, so be aware that they may have concurrent conditions, which can also impact on their ability to take their medication. For example, a patient may have eyesight problems so need larger print labels (the Royal National Institute for the Bling suggests font size 14 as a minimum).

All medicines should be stored in a cool, dry place (or in the fridge if the label states this) where they cannot be reached by children or pets, and this is particularly important for products that are easy to get into; a lockable bedside cabinet or a sturdy box placed out of reach may provide a solution. Bathroom and kitchen cabinets are not ideal because of the fluctuations in temperature and humidity.

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