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Keep Treatment on Track

Medication management goes high-tech.

BY Jennifer Fink

A liver transplant gave Greg Duggins a second chance at life—but it's medication that keeps his new liver going strong. Like all transplant patients, Duggins, age 55, of Garrison, New York, relies on a complicated regimen of pharmaceuticals to stave off organ rejection and infection. "When I got home from the hospital, I was taking 15 different drugs," Duggins says. Keeping track of them all is a daunting but crucial task, so Duggins uses his cell phone and computer to help.

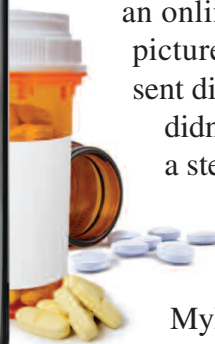
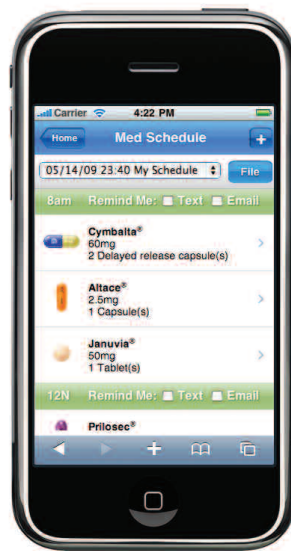
Taking meds exactly as prescribed is essential to managing any chronic illness, yet according to the American Heart Association, at any given time, 59 percent of those taking five or more medicines are taking them incorrectly. The No. 1 problem in treating illness today is patients' failure to take medication as prescribed; 10 percent of all hospital admissions and 23 percent of all nursing home admissions are the result of incorrect use of prescriptions.

Technology-based management systems are helping patients and health care providers tackle one of the most common cause of noncompliance: forgetfulness. Most people today

understand the importance of taking their medications, says Brian Morris, M.D., associate director of the UCLA Comprehensive Health Program. The challenge, he says, is "how to integrate that into your lifestyle." But the latest high-tech devices are more than simple reminder systems; they're powerful tools to help you improve your health and decrease health care costs.

How? Duggins uses a free system called MyMedSchedule.com, which includes an online list of his meds (with pictures) and text message reminders sent directly to his cell phone. "I didn't know a multivitamin from a steroid," Duggins says. "The list the nurses gave me had brand names, but the stuff I had was in generic names. MyMedSchedule literally held my hand until I understood what drug was what."

Duggins shared his user name and password with his sister, Linda, just in case. "That way, if anything happens to me, she knows what drugs I'm supposed to be taking," Duggins says. He can also print out reports to share with his health care providers.



A text or e-mail message sent to his cell phone alerts Duggins to take his medication at set times