

Discount Generic Prescription Programs Address Health Disparities Among Low-income Populations in Houston, Texas

Project Overview:

- Several retail stores including Kroger, Randalls, Target, Wal-Mart, HEB, Walgreens, and CVS offer the “Generic Prescriptions Program.” This program provides generic prescription medications for specific chronic illnesses at the discounted price of \$4 for a 30-day supply, or \$10 for a 90-day supply.
- At present, little is known about the factors that influence discount generic prescription utilization in low-income populations. **The purpose of this research study is to address this gap in knowledge and to better understand how low-income populations in Houston, Texas utilize the Generic Prescriptions Program.**

Background:

- A recent study by the Center for Studying Health System Change (HSC) found that those with low incomes, chronic conditions, and the uninsured face the greatest unmet prescription drug needs. In particular, the study noted that 35 percent of uninsured people -- totaling nearly 12.5 million working-age Americans in 2007 -- reported unmet prescription drug needs. An uninsured person is three times likely not to fill a prescription as someone with insurance.
- Frequently, low-income patients without the resources to obtain prescription medication forgo essential medication, increasing their health risk and contributing to health disparities.
- Under-use of prescription medication as a result of cost has been associated with negative health consequences, as well as increased use of emergency room visits and unnecessary hospitalizations. Many low-income chronically ill patients are not obtaining necessary medications, putting them at increased risk for higher rates of morbidity and mortality.

Research Intervention:

- The University of Texas M D Anderson Cancer Center, Center for Research on Minority Health, focuses on reducing health disparities in minority and medically underserved populations.
- The project is presently conducting a Geographical Information System (GIS) assessment of discount generic prescription outlets in Houston. As part of this effort, we will conduct focus groups and surveys to determine awareness, beliefs, and utilization of the discount generic prescription among low-income populations in Houston.
- In addition, we will conduct a clinic-based randomized intervention to control hypertension by facilitating easy access to needed generic prescription medication in low-income participants.

Policy Implications:

- The use of Generic Prescriptions Programs may lead to reduced emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and overall health care costs. Estimates indicate that every 1% increase in generic prescription drug use would produce \$4 billion in savings annually.
- Further, the use of these Programs is likely to result in reduced health disparities for low income populations, including reduced morbidity and mortality.