Financial incentives encourage better health, reveals research

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Financial incentives, such a rebates on prescription payments, can improve public health by encouraging more people to take their medication regularly, reveals new research from Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU Vienna).

According to a study undertaken by Marcel Bilger, Chair of health economics in the Health Economics and Policy Group at WU Vienna, small financial incentives can provide a cheap yet effective way of improving patients' long-term health by increasing the likelihood of people taking their prescribed medication more regularly.

Alongside researchers from Duke-NUS Medical School, Bilger and his team at WU Vienna undertook a study using 100 glaucoma patients. The researchers designed an incentive strategy for their study, offering rebates based on patients' behaviour. Those who took their medication regularly received small rebates on treatment costs.

Bilger found that the incentive of the rebate significantly increased the number of people who stuck to their prescription guidance. After 6 months, the participants who received rebates on their treatment costs having been rewarded for regularly taking their medication, had been found to have taken it on 73.1% of all days, which is 12.2% more than participants in the control group, who didn't receive any incentive.

As it stands, poor adherence to medications designed to treat long term illnesses is a global public health concern, with experts estimating that in the US alone, poor or irregular adherence to medications causes 125,000 deaths and creates additional costs of US$100 billion. Recent studies have also shown that even in high-income countries, 50% of chronic illnesses go untreated.

Marcel Bilger, Chair of health economics in the Health Economics and Policy Group at Vienna University of Economics and Business, says:

"Untreated chronic illnesses are a significant problem globally – both for the people affected and for our public health systems. So far, efforts for making people adhere to their treatments more have not been very successful and have often proved to be very costly. The results of our study highlight a potential cost-effective way of achieving improvements. The short-term rewards granted to patients who adhere to their medication motivate them to continue the treatment. As a result, they stay healthier for longer."

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For more information, a copy of the research paper, or to speak to Marcel Bilger, contact Jonny Stone at jonny@bluesky-pr.com

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