

# Colorado Center for Arthritis & Osteoporosis



To our patients,

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter. We hope it will be helpful and informative. We are grateful that we have been able to work with so many wonderful patients throughout the past year. Thank you for trusting us with your rheumatology care. We wish you a happy holiday season and look forward to continuing to provide your treatment in 2019.

## Insurance Changes in the New Year

Insurance changes often cause confusion and frustration when trying to see your doctor and get medications. With the exception of Kaiser Permanente, we continue to accept all insurance providers. If you find out about a new plan that will not cover CCAO, please let us know as soon as possible. We have been successful at getting added to these plans in the past so that we can continue to see our patients.

A common problem has been switching to a new plan that requires a referral from your primary care provider (PCP). This can be difficult if we do not find out until the time of your visit. At that point, you may need to reschedule the appointment because your insurance will not cover the cost of the visit. If you know your insurance requires a referral, please contact your PCP and request it. If you aren't sure, you can either send us a message through your portal account or call us to let us know about an insurance change. We are happy to help and contact your insurance and PCP if needed.

Another issue is related to medications that require authorizations. These are typically expensive "biologic" medications. Even if a medication was authorized by your old insurance company, your new insurance will almost certainly require a new authorization. If we don't find out about this until you are due for another dose of the medication or are about to run out, this may lead to not being able to get the medication on time. The authorization process can take weeks depending upon how quickly your insurance works. So, again, please let us know about any insurance changes as soon as possible.

## Taking Medications Regularly

There are many reasons why patients don't take medications. We recognize that every patient is an individual with different life experiences. For some, the concern about side effects or cost may result in taking medications less often or even not taking the medication at all. We know from studies involving patients with rheumatoid arthritis and osteoporosis that the benefit of medications is directly related to whether they are taken appropriately. These studies looked at how often a prescription was picked up at the pharmacy or requested from a mail order pharmacy to know how often it was taken. As you might expect, taking a medication part of the time may be better than not taking it at all but certainly isn't as good as taking it the way it is prescribed.

Before starting a medication, your doctor will discuss how a medication could help you, as well as the potential side effects. When you leave the office, the doctor will assume that you are taking the medication as prescribed unless they hear from you. If you have concerns about the medication, whether due to the cost, side effects, or just not being sure you'll be able to remember to take it regularly, please discuss this with your doctor. The patient portal is a great way to ask questions that inevitably pop up when you get back home. It is very likely that the doctor has seen other patients with similar questions or issues. We also have employees who specialize in medication authorizations and assistance programs, and they can be a great resource.

We understand that medications are getting more and more expensive every year. We truly wish this weren't the case, but there are often ways to obtain medications at a lower price. Surprisingly, sometimes your cost for a medication is actually lower if you pay the cash price yourself instead of running it through your insurance. Your pharmacist may be able to compare your cost with and without insurance if you ask. There are also websites that can provide coupons for cheaper medications and allow you to easily compare the cost of a particular medication at various local pharmacies. GoodRx.com is one that we often recommend. Many of the companies that make expensive medications have assistance programs for patients, which can significantly reduce the cost as well. Finally, the cost of a medication can vary greatly from one pharmacy to the next, and it may be worth calling around to find the best price.

Sometimes, despite trying everything we can think of, a medication is still too expensive. When that happens, we all try to do the best we can with the remaining options. The most important thing is that, if we don't know about the problems you may be having, we won't be able to help. Please don't hesitate to let us know.

## Annual Patient Survey

We send out requests to patients every year to complete a survey to let us know how we are doing. The questions range from asking about the friendliness of receptionists and nurses, to the amount of time spent on the phone or waiting for a doctor, to how well the doctor listened and how clearly they explained their thoughts. This year more than 1200 patients completed the survey. The vast majority of responses were very positive, but we are always looking to improve so welcome the "negative" comments that give us guidance on how we could be doing better. While some suggestions would be difficult to implement—we are not going to provide alcohol options in the waiting room and can't guarantee your phone app will always give you reliable directions to our offices—we did take others to heart and updated the décor in all of our offices (which was long overdue!).

We know many of our patients drive long distances to see our doctors, so we added a 5<sup>th</sup> office in Northglenn to be more convenient for patients living or working in that area. There were also comments about preferring appointments earlier in the day, so we now have 2 doctors in our Wheat Ridge, Broomfield, and Boulder offices who start seeing patients at 7:00 in the morning. In addition, we have simplified the way to pay your bills online. If you have a portal account, you can pay through that now. In the coming months all patients will be able to follow a link from our website (ccao.net) to pay directly.

We listened to you and tried backing off on how often we send messages to remind you about your appointments, but that quickly led to a surprising increase in the number of patients forgetting and not showing up for their appointments. So we have dialed that back up a bit (though not like it used to be), and hope that we've reached a happy medium.

We truly want to provide superior care for our patients and welcome your feedback, whether positive comments about what we're doing well or constructive criticism in areas we can improve.