Practical problems with medication use experienced by older people: a qualitative study

Objective

• To identify the practical problems that older people experience with the daily use of their medicines and their strategies to overcome these problems
• To determine the potential clinical relevance of these practical problems

Methods

Study design: a qualitative study by semistructured interviews

Setting: a community pharmacy and a geriatric outpatient ward in Utrecht, the Netherlands

Participants

- 59 community-dwelling people
- Age ≥70 years
- ≥3 different oral prescription medicines daily
- Self-management with respect to medication use

Data collection

- Participants were interviewed at their own home
- Questions concerned their experiences with the sequential steps of the medication use process for each of their oral prescription medicines
- Classification of potential clinical relevance of identified practical problems and management strategies by expert panel

Results

- 56 (95%) participants experienced ≥1 practical problem
- 10 (17%) participants experienced ≥1 practical problem that was considered to potentially cause moderate or severe clinical deterioration
- 11 (17%) problems were considered to potentially cause moderate or severe clinical deterioration

Conclusions

- Older people experience practical problems when using their medicines
- These problems can result into incorrect medication use, which may have clinically relevant consequences
- The findings challenge drug developers, regulators and healthcare professionals to find ways to diminish the practical problems that older people experience

This study has been accepted for publication (Notenboom et al. JAGS 2014)