

The Medication Unit

A guide to understanding an
important part of your recovery

RBHA

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Welcome to the Medication Unit!

By now you have probably already experienced one of the most important services provided by this program...seeing the psychiatrist or nurse practitioner. In addition to these individuals, the Medication Unit is comprised of receptionists, nurses, Medication Access staff, and a nurse supervisor or team leader. Depending on your needs, you may also interact with them. This guide is intended to help you understand certain operating policies of the Medication Unit so that you can better utilize this service. It will also answer some frequently asked questions.

The Psychiatrist/Nurse Practitioner

RBHA employs both psychiatrists and nurse practitioners. Depending on the type of services you need, you may see one or the other. Many people who seek services at the RBHA do so because they need access to one of these professionals for medications to help in their recovery. Because resources are limited, you may have to wait several days or even weeks before an appointment can be made for you. Priority is given to those whose symptoms are worsening, those discharging from hospitals and those having medication-related side effects.

Access to Services

If you are accessing the services for the first time, you will most likely be given an initial 30-minute appointment. The primary goal of this first appointment is to assess medications you may be on or need to have prescribed. You may need more medications or you may have problems that require additional medications or changes. This is also a time when any severe symptoms will be addressed.

After this initial visit, you will be scheduled for a one hour **psychiatric evaluation**. The purpose of this appointment is to allow time for your healthcare professional to fully explore your issues and concerns, take a history, develop a more accurate diagnosis, evaluate the effectiveness of your medications and provide you with education about your illness and your medications. You may be assigned a different doctor than you saw at your first visit. This is not unusual because of the urgent nature of the initial evaluation.

Once you have had your psychiatric evaluation, you are normally scheduled to see this individual again and then on an ongoing basis. The thing to remember is that all of our healthcare providers are well-trained and can assist you.

If you are returning for a routine follow-up appointment, your provider may recommend that you come back anywhere from one week to three months, depending on your needs at the time you are seen. The Medication Unit receptionist will work with you to schedule your appointments. Some of our prescribers only work certain hours or certain days of the week, so there may be some limits on when you can be scheduled.

Frequently Asked Questions

What happens if I miss my appointment?

Appointments with your prescriber are critical to your recovery. This is the only way he or she can assess that the medications you have been prescribed are working for you and your symptoms are controlled. Please make every effort to keep them! If you miss an appointment, please **do not** contact the Medication Unit receptionist. Instead, contact your case manager and ask to be rescheduled. Because your appointments with your prescriber are an important part of your overall treatment, it is the responsibility of the case manager to connect you to this important service. If you do not know your case manager's name or you can't reach your case manager, ask the switchboard operator to connect you with a supervisor. It may be several days or even a month before you can get a rescheduled appointment.

I missed my doctors' appointment and now I need medications. What can I do?

If you are concerned that you may run out of medications or need adjustments or changes before your next appointment, let your case manager know. He or she can contact your prescriber and request that your medications be renewed, adjusted, or re-filled. Depending on the circumstances, your prescriber may or may not agree to do this. That is why it is so important to keep your appointments.

My appointment was cancelled by the doctor or the agency and I need medications. What can I do?

Sometimes unavoidable things do happen. Sickneses occur, weather doesn't cooperate and traffic jams create obstacles. If you are scheduled to see a prescriber and your appointment is canceled through no fault of your own, let your case manager know that you need refills on your medication and a new appointment. Every effort will be made to accommodate you in a timely fashion.

I'm having issues with my provider. How do I address these?

Your relationship with your healthcare professional is very important to your successful recovery. If you are dissatisfied with the care you are being provided, it is okay to say so. But remember, there may be times that you disagree with your physician's or practitioner's opinion. That is to be expected. But you can usually work through those times and maintain a good relationship.

If you continue to be unhappy with your provider, let your case manager know. If it is agreeable that a change would help you, then he or she will assist you with that change.

If you feel you have not been treated fairly, you may contact the RBHA Office of Consumer & Family Affairs at (804) 819-4078.

I am in between appointments and I need to ask my doctor a question. Who do I call?

If you are in between appointments and you discover that you need to consult with your provider, please contact your case manager. The Medication Unit receptionist is instructed not to forward calls directly to the doctors/practitioners, to avoid interrupting care. Often the case manager can help you with your questions without needing to call your provider. If your concern does require the prescriber's attention, then your case manager will address it with the prescriber and report back to you.

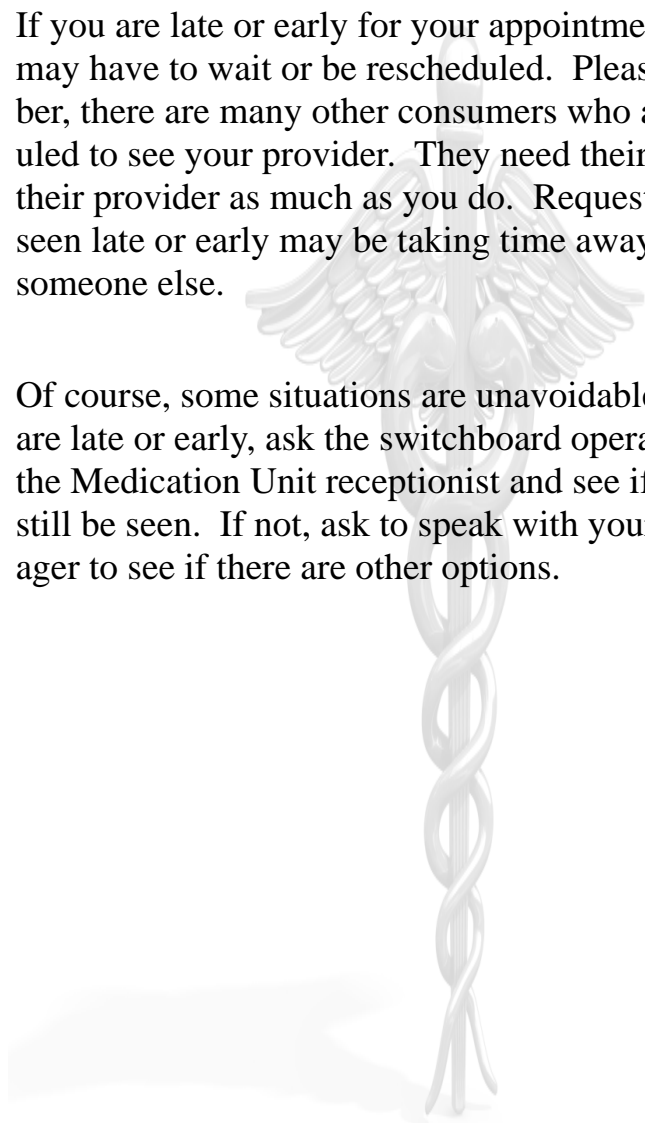
How do I get important documents (disability forms, for example) signed?

If you have something that your doctor needs to sign, please bring it to the attention of your case manager as soon as you become aware of it. It may take some time before your doctor can review the document and your case manager is responsible for gathering your chart and any other information your doctor may need. Some documents are very detailed and take a long time to complete. Other documents require that you be present and can only be completed during your appointment. If you bring a document with you to an appointment, depending on what it is, your provider may not be able to complete it during your session.

What happens if I'm late or early for my appointment?

If you are late or early for your appointment, you may have to wait or be rescheduled. Please remember, there are many other consumers who are scheduled to see your provider. They need their time with their provider as much as you do. Requesting to be seen late or early may be taking time away from someone else.

Of course, some situations are unavoidable. If you are late or early, ask the switchboard operator to call the Medication Unit receptionist and see if you can still be seen. If not, ask to speak with your case manager to see if there are other options.



The following is a list of symptoms that are warning signs of a psychiatric relapse. Be sure to tell your provider and case manager if you experience any of the following:

- ◇ **Appetite and sleep pattern changes**
- ◇ **Becoming more isolated**
- ◇ **Missing doses of medication**
- ◇ **Becoming more hostile, irritable, nervous or angry**
- ◇ **Neglecting personal hygiene**
- ◇ **Choosing inappropriate clothing or make-up**
- ◇ **Mood swings, crying spells, agitation, or impulsiveness**
- ◇ **Reckless spending or sexual conduct**
- ◇ **Difficulty concentrating or becoming easily confused**
- ◇ **Distraction by voices/visions or by intrusive thoughts**
- ◇ **Increased paranoia**
- ◇ **Alcohol and/or drug use**
- ◇ **Thoughts of death or suicide**

You can also call the RBHA 24-hour Crisis Line at 819-4100 if you have these or any other symptoms.

Medication Prescriptions

As previously mentioned, one of the main reasons many individuals seek psychiatric services is for medications to help manage their symptoms and promote their recovery. Your healthcare professional will assess your symptoms and concerns, review what has worked for you in the past, and evaluate the effectiveness and safety of medications you are currently taking. He or she should also educate you about the pros and cons of the medications you take. Printed information is available if you request it. Once your visit is over, your prescriber will either give you written prescriptions or send them electronically to your pharmacy.

Normally your physician/nurse practitioner will only provide you with enough medications to last until your next appointment. This is because most mental health disorders are unpredictable in their course and your doctor/nurse practitioner needs to see you often to re-evaluate your treatment. He or she may also be trying to carefully adjust your medication doses and therefore needs to see you within a certain timeframe. You can expect that your provider will write prescriptions with no refills or only one or two refills, depending on when they need to see you again.

Frequently Asked Questions

I kept my appointment but my pharmacy says they didn't receive my prescriptions. What should I do?

At the RBHA, our prescribers use an online prescribing program wherein they can send prescriptions by fax or e-mail to the pharmacy of your choice. This has many advantages. Prescriptions are less likely to get lost, the prescriptions are easier for the pharmacist to read, errors are reduced, and time is saved. Almost all of the pharmacies in the metropolitan area are connected to this system and can receive prescriptions from it.

Sometimes the transmission is interrupted or there may be mechanical failures at the local pharmacy. If you kept your appointment but for some reason your pharmacy cannot find your prescriptions, you can contact your case manager or the Medication Unit Team Leader for assistance. This type of occurrence can be quickly and easily resolved.

What do I do if the pharmacist tells me my insurance company won't pay for my medications?

Sometimes insurance companies require what is called “prior authorization” before they will pay for the cost of a particular medication. Sometimes they require that you try an older, less-expensive, or generic product before they will agree to pay for certain drugs. In either case, your pharmacist will contact your provider and request instructions on what to do. Often your provider can contact your insurance company and get your medication authorized. This process can take a day or two to resolve. If you are out of medication in the meantime, contact your case manager and let them know. Please do not call the Medication Unit receptionist, as this person will refer you to your case manager anyway. Your case manager can consult with your physician/NP about how best to assist you.

Can I ask my psychiatrist or nurse practitioner to write orders for my medical conditions *and* my mental health condition?

The RBHA is licensed to provide care for individuals with mental health, intellectual disability, or substance abuse issues. Therefore the prescribers working here only prescribe medications intended to treat the symptoms associated with one of these disorders. They will gladly collaborate with your primary care provider (PCP) but it is best to have your PCP prescribe for conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, chronic pain, etc.

What do I do if I lose my prescriptions or medications?

If you lose your prescriptions or medications, contact your case manager. She or he will consult with your healthcare professional to see how best to assist you. If there is a history of medication abuse or repeated occurrences of lost or stolen medications, then it may be more difficult for you to get more. Again, your case manager is your best resource for assistance of this type.

How can I afford my medications if I don't have any prescription insurance?

Many people who come to the RBHA for services do not have any type of health insurance or prescription coverage. Some have coverage but they do not realize they have it. Some may have been eligible to receive prescription coverage but were unaware of this.

If you have **Medicaid**, more than likely you have prescription coverage. Your case manager can help you determine this. If you have **Medicaid AND Medicare**, the same applies. If you only have **Medicare**, then you may be eligible to enroll in a prescription plan. You may even be eligible for extra financial aid from Social Security to help you pay the cost of a Medicare prescription plan. Your case manager can help you figure out if you are eligible.

If you and your case manager determine that you have no prescription coverage, then there are several options you can employ. There are several pharmacies in the area that have generic drug programs. You and your prescriber may decide that you could benefit from medications included in these programs. Most of them advertise monthly supplies of medication for as little as \$4.00 a month. Some medications are available as samples, supplied to the RBHA by the sales representatives who work for the various companies. You can ask your provider if there are samples available. If you find that you still need assistance, your case manager and physician/NP may refer you to the **Medication Access Program**.

The Medication Access Program

As noted before, some people come to the RBHA with no insurance of any kind; neither general health insurance nor prescription insurance. This presents a difficult barrier to recovery. Your case manager will meet with you to explore whether or not you might qualify for entitlement programs such as Medicare and Medicaid but it may take a long time for those determination to be made. With that understanding in mind, the RBHA maintains the **Medication Access Program**. This program is intended to provide assistance to individuals who have no prescription coverage and no other way of paying for their medications.

The criteria to access this program include being below 200% of federal poverty level and having no prescription coverage. There may be other factors involved with determining whether or not this program is available to you. The Medication Access staff may ask you some additional questions intended to help identify how best to help you with your medications.

The Medication Access Program works with several sources to help you. Depending on what your provider prescribes, they may give you manufacturers' samples or coupons, they may order your medication from a drug company's **patient assistance program**, or they may order your medication from a pharmacy that is operated by the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services. This pharmacy is called the **Community Resource Pharmacy**.

The thing to remember is that the Medication Access Program **is not** a pharmacy. It is a program that helps find ways to get you the medications you need. As such, they do not keep all medications on hand at all times. Some of your medications may have to be ordered and you may have to return on a different day to pick up your medications. Also, because of the financial limitations of all these possible sources, you may not be able to get all the medications your doctor /NP has ordered. You may need to consult with your case manager and doctor/ NP to decide upon a different medication that **is** available through the Medication Access Program.

Medications provided to you through the Medication Access Program are normally distributed to you in 30-day supplies. Sometimes your provider may require that you come back more frequently. Your provider will send prescriptions and instructions electronically or hand-written to the staff. It is very important that he or she sees you at intervals that they request so that they can provide you with the best service. Because this is so vital to your recovery, **orders received by the Medication Access Program are only valid until your next doctor/NP appointment.**

If you miss a doctor's appointment or NP's appointment and run out of medications, you will need to contact your case manager and ask them to assist you with getting new prescriptions. Your provider may request that you come in so that your response and well-being can be evaluated before he or she will authorize more medications.

If the Medication Access Program provides you with medications dispensed from the **Community Resource Pharmacy**, you may see a notation on the label that indicates several refills are available. **This is an internal tracking number only!!!** This does not indicate how many times you can pick up your meds before you see your doctor/NP again. The Medication Access Program staff can help you understand this better.

An important point to remember is that the Medication Access Program is here to help those with no way to pay for medication. If you are getting your medications from this program and become eligible for Medicare, Medicaid, some other prescription insurance, or your finances improve, you will no longer be eligible and will need to obtain your prescriptions at a local drug store. The members of your Treatment Team will be happy to assist you in this process.

Please let your case manager and the Medication Access Program staff know if you become eligible for any benefits. By doing this, not only will you be participating in your own recovery, but you will help ensure that this valuable assistance is available to the next person who needs help.

Frequently Asked Questions

How will I know when I can pick up more medication?

Many times your refills are due on the same day you see your prescriber. If not, the Medication Access staff can let you know when you are due to pick up refills. The Medication Unit receptionist may be able to adjust your MD/NP appointment time so that it coincides with your refill pick-up date.

What happens if I'm late or early for a refill through the Medication Access Program?

Sometimes there are good reasons why you may be late or early picking up your medications.

Sometimes, however, being early or late might be a signal that you're having some difficulty taking your medications correctly and your treatment team members need to know this.

If you are more than seven days early or seven days late picking up your refills, you will need to contact your case manager. Your case manager will need to consult with your prescriber to see if it is okay for you to pick up your medications.

My medication bottle says I have ten refills, but the Medication Access Program staff tells me that I am out of refills. How can that be?

Remember, bottles of medication that you pick up, especially those dispensed by the Community Resource Pharmacy, may indicate several refills available. This is an internal tracking mechanism. If you have been told you have no more refills, it could be that you are due or overdue to see your prescriber. The Medication Access Program staff will be able to let you know if this is the case. If you do need new prescriptions or a doctor's appointment, your case manager is the person to help you.

Why do I have to make so many trips to the RBHA to pick up meds?

There may be unavoidable times when you have to return to the RBHA to pick up your medications more frequently than you'd like. It may be that your provider has changed your medication or changed the dose. It may be that there was a delay in shipping your medication. It may just be that the date that you are due to pick up refills and the day you see the physician/NP are different. If this last case applies to you, the Medication Unit receptionist may be able to adjust your appointment with your provider so that it corresponds with the dates you need to pick up medication.

It is not unusual for the Medication Access Program staff to use several different sources to obtain your medication. These different sources may send different amounts, depending on their own policies. Therefore, you may receive amounts of medication that you use up at different times.

What should I do with leftover, unused, or discontinued medications?

If you find that you have bottles of unused, leftover, or discontinued medications, it is best not to keep them. You may become confused as to which ones you should take or worse, they might get into the

hands of children or someone who shouldn't have them. If you decide that you want to dispose of them yourself, **do not flush them down the toilet!!!**

This practice can potentially contaminate the water supply. Instead, empty your pills into something undesirable like coffee grounds, leftover food, even potting soil, then wrap them up in newspaper and dispose of them in the trash. An even better solution is to bring all your old medications with you to your next appointment at the RBHA. The staff of the Medication Access Program will gladly dispose of them for you in a safe manner.

Nursing Services

In addition to the prescribers, the receptionist, and the staff of the Medication Access Program, the Medication Unit also has registered nurses. The nurses of the Medication Unit routinely administer injections of long-acting psychiatric medications, as well as see consumers for lab work that their provider has requested. They are also available to check weight, blood pressure, and answer health-related questions, as time permits. The nurses are responsible for scheduling lab work and injections and try to coordinate injection appointments with those of the prescriber.

Frequently Asked Questions

What do I do if I miss my appointment with the nurse?

Normally, if you miss your appointment with the nurse, she or he will contact your case manager and let them know you have missed. Your case manager may call to re-schedule you. You may also call the nurse directly and ask to be rescheduled. If you have missed an appointment and then show up unscheduled, there may be a delay in being seen as the nurse may have other scheduled appointments, other scheduled events, or may have to request your record.

Can I get a copy of my lab reports?

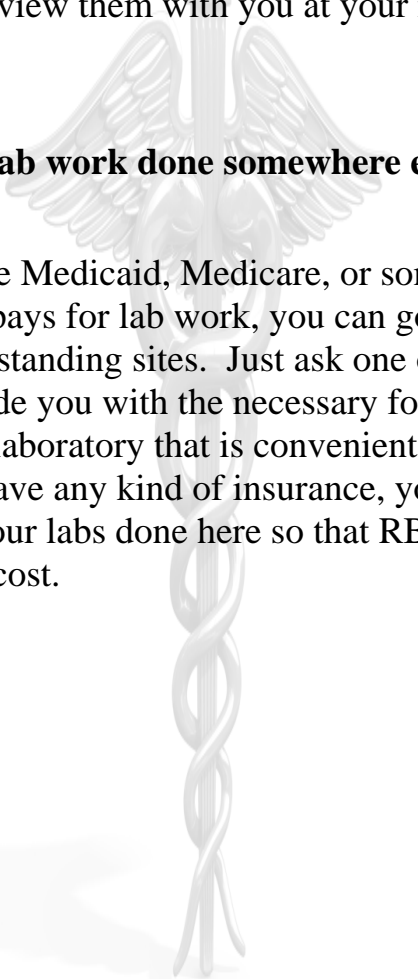
Yes. When you have lab work done at RBHA, we will be glad to provide you with a copy of your lab reports or we can fax them to your primary care provider. If you would like us to mail or fax your results to someone you will simply need to sign a “release of information” form with your case manager so that we can share this.

Why do I have to come in for labs several days or weeks before I see my prescriber?

Some lab reports take a few days to be completed. The goal is to be sure that all requested reports are back from the lab and in your chart so that your provider can review them with you at your next appointment.

Can I get my lab work done somewhere else?

Yes, if you have Medicaid, Medicare, or some other insurance that pays for lab work, you can go to any of several free-standing sites. Just ask one of the nurses to provide you with the necessary forms and directions to a laboratory that is convenient for you. If you do not have any kind of insurance, you will need to have your labs done here so that RBHA can assist with the cost.



Important Information

My Provider is:

My Case Manager is:

My Case Manager's Phone Number:

