

Prescription help available for the unemployed

Written by
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Despite assertions that the recession is ending, many Americans are still out of work and continue to have trouble finding employment. Since 2000, a steady increase in unemployment has contributed to a lack of employer-sponsored insurance coverage. Without health coverage, many have difficulty accessing needed medical care including prescription medicines.

The national unemployment rate is uncharacteristically high at nearly 10%, and has been for more than a year. Minority populations struggle the most, with over 15% of the African American population and over 12% of the Hispanic population currently unemployed. Data suggest that the high unemployment rate means an increase in uninsured individuals.

Without employer-based insurance coverage, many uninsured patients lack access to a medical home and ultimately forego preventative health care measures, which are critical to maintaining good health.

Millicent Gorham, Executive Director of the National Black Nurses Association, recommends patient assistance programs as a way for patients to gain access to the medicines they need if they become unemployed and uninsured.

"Without insurance coverage, many people fail to receive the medical care they need, especially when it comes to their prescription drugs," says Gorham. "African-Americans are particularly at risk. Many pharmaceutical companies offer patient assistance programs to help patients in need get access to prescription medicines. These programs can be a huge help when folks are struggling to make ends meet."

One patient assistance program, the Pfizer MAINTAINTM Program, was developed to help eligible, unemployed patients continue to take their Pfizer medicines despite losing their prescription drug coverage. July marks the 1-year anniversary of the MAINTAIN program, which is part of Pfizer's family of patient assistance programs, Pfizer Helpful Answers[®]. Pfizer Helpful Answers and the Wyeth patient assistance programs have helped nearly 6 million uninsured and underinsured patients get access to more than 48 million prescriptions in the past 5 years (2005-2010) alone.

Last year, Emmanuel Stone was laid off from his job as an IT engineer in Independence, MO, and lost his insurance coverage. When he learned of the MAINTAIN program, he applied, his eligibility was verified and he was accepted within only a few weeks.

"The MAINTAIN program has allowed me to get the Pfizer prescription medicines I could not have gotten otherwise during these difficult times" says Stone. "I wish more programs like this existed."

"We launched our first patient assistance program at Pfizer more than 20 years ago," said Gary Pelletier, Director and Team Leader of Pfizer Helpful Answers. "Since then, we've evolved our programs to meet the changing needs of people who don't have prescription insurance. Our still-struggling economy is evidence that these programs are still highly important, especially to individuals who are recently without their medical coverage."

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If you or someone you know is interested in finding out more information about Pfizer's patient assistance programs or to check your eligibility status, call 1-866-706-2400 or visit www.PfizerHelpfulAnswers.com.