What Fibro Patients Should Know About Affording Treatment

by ANGELA FINLAY

Financial Assistance for Fibro Treatment

Fibromyalgia is a varied and variable disease with a range of possible treatments, and it can be a pricey experiment to work through all of the medications and therapies before you land on something that works for you. In most cases, you will need to take some medication, and those drugs can add up to a big financial strain. Take control of your condition and treatment with some research, good communication with your doctor, and an open mind.

Getting the Financial Help You Need

There are several programs run by the government, pharmaceutical companies and not-for-profit organizations to help fibromyalgia patients get their medications at a reduced cost. In most cases, you will need careful and thorough documentation to prove that your fibro has disabled you, and that your income cannot cover your treatment, but there's a good chance that one of these programs can offer some help:

- **Drug companies.** If you contact the pharmaceutical company directly, you may be able to find a cheaper generic version of your medication. Alternatively, the representatives might be able to point you towards a financial assistance program that covers that particular medication, or else something comparable.
- **Social security insurance (SSI)**. Fibromyalgia disability benefits are a possibility if you can prove your condition is both total and permanent. If you're no longer able to work, you may qualify for social security.
- **Temporary emergency assistance (TANF)**. Different states offer temporary assistance for low-income patients, so look into the health and human services (HHS) office near you.

The best way to increase your eligibility is to keep good records: maintain a symptom diary to track your disease progression, which will help when it comes to filling out forms or explaining your needs to organizations.

Alternative Ways to Treat Symptoms

Medication is a first line of defense for fibromyalgia, but you may be able to reduce the amount you need to live comfortably. Consider some complementary therapies that can eliminate some of your discomfort and improve your productivity, mood, and general quality of life:

- **Get more aerobic exercise**. It isn't an easy and complete solution, but regular exercise can diminish many fibromyalgia symptoms, from depression and anxiety to sleep problems, constipation and fatigue. Every patient's different, and it can be dangerous to push yourself too hard, but consider adding gradually to your workout routine for more comfort in the long run.

- **Try acupuncture.** Acupuncture has been incredibly useful for some fibromyalgia patients. It isn't a cure on its own, but when used in conjunction with other treatments, acupuncture can increase your quality of life. The course of treatment is personal: depending on your symptoms (and your wallet), you could go as

often as weekly, or once every 10 weeks and still derive some benefit.

- **Train your mind**. Negative thinking and depression can spark physical reactions, so it’s no surprise that hypnosis and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) have both been shown to improve quality of life. Although formal sessions can be pricey, once you learn the techniques from a cognitive behavioral therapist, you can use them again and again on your own time to relieve stress and pain.

Successful fibromyalgia treatment rests on a combined effort between you and your doctor. You need to trust your medical team and be diligent with your fibro management, but your doctor should also be open to new approaches to treating your symptoms.

If you can no longer afford to abide by your treatment plan, it may be time to change your medications and complementary therapies altogether, and it’s vital that your doctor is on board.