HOW COMORBIDITIES IMPACT DRUG THERAPY

The percentage of workers’ compensation claims with a comorbidity has nearly tripled in the last decade. It is well understood that comorbidities increase the overall medical complexity of a claim. But they can specifically impact pharmacy management in ways that go beyond the obvious. The graphic below demonstrates why certain drug therapies commonly prescribed in workers’ compensation pose elevated risk to patients with comorbid conditions.

**PSYCHOSOCIAL DISORDERS**

Injured workers are 45% more likely to be treated for depression than non-injured workers.

**Pharmacy considerations:**
- Patients with a psychosocial disorder are more likely to abuse opioids.
- Benzodiazepines, such as diazepam and alprazolam, are commonly prescribed to injured workers for anxiety and are dangerous when mixed with opioids.
- Antidepressant misuse can also lead to overdose and ER visits.

**HYPERTENSION**

The most common comorbidity in workers’ compensation, which raises the average cost of a claim 6x.

**Pharmacy considerations:**
- Many medications commonly prescribed in workers’ compensation can increase blood pressure.
- Antidepressants
- NSAIDs
- Acetaminophen
- Erectile dysfunction medications

**RESPIRATORY DISORDERS**

Average cost of a claim with a respiratory disorder such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, and sleep apnea is nearly $15,000.

**Pharmacy considerations:**
- Opioids are not recommended in patients with significant respiratory disorders, such as bronchial asthma or sleep apnea, due to an increased risk of opioid-induced respiratory depression.

**REFERENCES:**