



Santa Clara
Family Health Plan
The Spirit of Care

To: Providers
From: Jeff Robertson, MD, Chief Medical Officer
Date: November 13, 2017
Subject: **When Antibiotics are Not the Answer – What Should You Do?**

Dear Providers:

With flu season upon us, there's even less time for patient education in a busy practice. What do you say to patients who want antibiotics for conditions you know antibiotics won't help?

Here are five ways to improve patient satisfaction and understanding while avoiding unnecessary antibiotics.

1. Instead of telling your patient "It's just a virus," try giving them a specific diagnosis, for example, "viral bronchitis." Your patient will be more likely to feel like you've heard them.
2. Explain ways to help relieve symptoms. Your patient may not know that alternatives to antibiotics will work better to relieve their symptoms. Cold-care kits containing small packages of tissue, appropriate pain/fever relievers, and written recommendations that include information on alternative treatments to feel better are a way for your patients to not go home empty-handed. The CDC has an Rx sheet for symptomatic relief, available for download here: <http://tinyurl.com/CDCprescriptionpad>. There are also letters you may hand out or mail to your patients at the beginning of cold and flu season: <http://tinyurl.com/CDCAbxLetter>.
3. Share normal findings as you go through your exam. For example, let patients know that their lungs sound clear, or that you are not seeing inflammation in their child's ear. It's reassuring for patients to know that the illness is not as severe as they thought, and may make them less likely to ask for an antibiotic.
4. If the patient still asks for antibiotics, discuss potential side effects of antibiotic use, including adverse events and drug resistance. Many patients don't realize that antibiotics can be harmful.
5. Tell your patients what to expect over the next few days. It's reassuring to hear from you that they should feel better soon, even if they feel really bad now. Let patients know when to call you for help (including calling you before they go to the ER, unless it is truly an emergency) and that you'll prescribe antibiotics when and if it is appropriate. Knowledge is power.

For more resources to help reduce inappropriate antibiotic use, visit the following link:
<https://www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use/community/materials-references/index.html>.

Thank you!