Pharmacogenetics — A New Way to Personalize Your Healthcare

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Pharmacogenetics (AKA Pharmacogenomics)

Pharmacogenetics (PGx) -- the study of how genetics affects your response to drugs -- is an exciting field in healthcare. Read our recent post to learn the basics of PGx and why it's important in predicting your response to certain medications. But who needs testing? How does it work? In this post we'll talk about practical issues of pharmacogenetic testing.

First, WHO should consider pharmacogenetic testing and WHY?

Most of us have meaningful genetic variations in our drug-metabolizing enzymes. Not only that, but many of us take at least one med that can be affected by those variations. And the more meds we take, the higher the chance those genetic variations will be important. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recommended genetic testing before starting treatment with several medications and has given guidance about testing for nearly 150 others. And research continues to provide new information about genetic differences in drug responses. Pharmacogenetic testing can help doctors prescribe the *right* drug at the *right* dose, the *first* time. So really, anyone who takes prescription medications, or who might in the future, can benefit from PGx testing.

Next, WHEN is the right time for pharmacogenetic testing?

As mentioned above, FDA recommends PGx testing prior to starting certain medications. At the time your doctor wants to use one of those meds, they can order a PGx test to determine if that med is likely to be safe and effective for you. The drawback with that timing is that they may have to delay treatment while awaiting test results. Another option is to do testing proactively, before it's absolutely necessary. Then results are already available

when a new medication is needed. Your doctor can confidently prescribe a safe and effective medicine without having to wait for test results.

The great thing about PGx testing is that *results last a lifetime.* Since genetic makeup doesn't change, PGx test results can be used years down the road. When a new diagnosis is made, or a new medication is marketed, those results will be able to guide treatment decisions. So having the test done before you need it - proactively - may be the most efficient way to put PGx into action, and make your healthcare more personal.

WHAT type of test?

Several types of PGx tests are currently available. "Single gene tests" are used when trying to decide if it's safe to use one particular medication. Multi-gene tests, called "panels", test several genes. Some panels test a small number of genes based on a person's current medication regimen or health problems. Other panels are broader, testing most of the genes that affect the metabolism and transport of medications.

A broad-spectrum PGx panel is a good choice for anyone who wants information that'll be useful both now and later. ***Better My Meds*** works with OneOme, a lab founded by Mayo Clinic over a decade ago. They offer the RightMed® test, a broad-spectrum PGx panel that currently covers 27 genes.

Finally, WHERE and HOW is the test done?

Though PGx testing is available without a prescription, there are drawbacks to that approach. One is that while the actual testing process is simple, interpreting the results is likely to be a stumbling block for most consumers. Another is that it puts you in charge of being sure your healthcare providers have access to the results and know how to use them.

We recommend looking to your healthcare team for Pharmacogenetic testing. You can find it at some clinics, hospitals, community pharmacies and Medication Management Services. But the type of test (single-gene, specific gene panel, or broad-spectrum panel) will vary from place to place. ***BetterMyMeds*** is ready to help with a broad-spectrum PGx test that will provide information you can use now and into the future. **Learn more.**

The testing process is simple. First, ask your doctor to write an order for the test. You'll get a test kit with a cotton swab to rub along the inside of each cheek, collecting cells that contain genetic information. The swab gets sealed inside a protective container and sent to the

lab, and results come back in about a week. You can see a sample report here.

Pharmacists are your experts in PGx test interpretation. The best way to get a clear understanding of the results is to meet with a pharmacist who has experience interpreting PGx test results. Pharmacists have extensive training in drug metabolism, so are able to interpret and explain results better than other medical professionals. When you work with ***Better My Meds*** you'll get a written report clearly explaining your results. We'll also provide a copy of the results for you to share with your doctor and your medical record. More information about PGx testing services from *BetterMyMeds* can be found here.

It's up to you to make your healthcare personal!

We've talked in the past about the the importance of good communication between patients and their healthcare providers. If you feel that pharmacogenetic testing is right for you, or for someone in your family, it's up to you to discuss it with your prescriber. Bring up the issue, explain your concerns, and request a written order to perform the test. It may not be a priority for your prescriber unless they know it's a priority for you!

Betty Chaffee, PharmD, is owner and sole proprietor of BetterMyMeds, a Medication Management service devoted to helping people get the maximum benefit from their medications.