

UW Health: Teaches patients virtually to give themselves injections at home

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MADISON, Wis. – At first, the idea of giving herself a shot at home was daunting for Cheryl Bowman, but a new program at UW Health gave her the ability and confidence to do just that.

Bowman, who lives in Waunakee with her husband and 11-year-old daughter, has struggled for years with psoriasis, a condition that causes her skin to grow at seven times the normal rate.

“It’s a very visible condition, and it has a bit of a self-confidence effect on you,” she said.

The most common symptom of psoriasis is a rash, but sometimes the rashes can impact joints or tendons.

Her doctors over the years have tried several therapies, but nothing seemed to work. However, recently a new type of drug came on the market that her doctor thought might treat her skin condition, except this drug had a catch – it needs to be given as a shot.

This means patients often must drive to a clinic to receive their first injections and learn how to use the injection from a nurse, according to Shelby Gomez, clinical pharmacist, UW Health. This in-person appointment can often be delayed by a patient’s lengthy commute or busy schedule, which can lead to a delay in beginning a new medication.

In 2020, keeping patients out of the clinic for non-emergency procedures was a high

priority due to the pandemic, and teaching how to self-administer medications at home virtually was a simple way to do this. But this was not yet commonly done with injectable drugs at UW Health, Gomez said.

At that time, Eric Friestrom, pharmacy program manager, UW Health, was working on his pharmacy master's degree project developing a process to indeed teach patients virtually how to give themselves injectable drugs at home. It was then piloted at UW Health in dermatology.

Once the drug is prescribed, the pharmacy team sends the first dose of medication to the patient and sets up a virtual visit to demonstrate how to perform the injection, which allows the patient to practice with a pharmacist overseeing via video.

Bowman, who was taught the procedure by Gomez, felt as though she was her partner in the process, Bowman said.

"She just made me feel so comfortable," she said. "Once we got through that first visit, I felt like this was no big deal."

Since the program launched formally in 2021, UW Health has assisted more than 100 patients, from children to older adults, in this process, according to Gomez.

Nurses have told her that the program has decreased their workload and reduced the number of calls to the clinic, though some patients still prefer an in-person experience, she said.

The adherence to the new psoriasis medication has made a difference for Bowman as it has worked so well her family and friends now say they can't tell she has the condition, she said.

"My quality of life is better both emotionally and physically," Bowman said. "I never thought I could inject myself with this drug, but it's so much easier than I thought it would be."

Gomez is available for interviews today, and recorded interviews with Gomez and Bowman are available.