

# Streamlining Needs for Everyday Practice: Three Websites That Make Your Life Easier

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**A**s an oncology nurse practitioner (NP) in community practice, I spend the majority of my day seeing patients—or at least that’s what you would think. Realistically, in today’s healthcare setting, all of the paperwork, prior authorizations, non-formulary exceptions, pre-certifications, and letters of medical necessity take up a great deal of time and make actually seeing patients more difficult. Furthermore, many patients cannot afford their medications, requiring more time of the NP to assist them in getting the medicine they need. This can become a daunting task, even if the patient has insurance. Poor insurance, while providing minimal coverage for expensive medications, may also make policy holders ineligible for participation in many of the pharmaceutical industry-sponsored patient assistance programs (PAP). Fortunately, I have come across three websites that are useful in getting the information *I* need to help my patients get what *they* need.

## Formulary Musical Chairs

As soon as I have (somewhat) memorized which antibiotic, antiemetic, or antidepressant I can prescribe on any given insurance company’s formulary, a new year brings new changes, and my memory is quickly out of date. While trying to discover if my patient’s insurance plan cov-

ered varenicline (Chantix) on its formulary, I stumbled across an extremely helpful and free online tool entitled Fingertip Formulary® (<http://www.fingertipformulary.com>). This website stays current on formulary changes, and I have yet to encounter a medication or healthcare plan not included in its database. Fingertip Formulary® is easy to navigate and requires just a few simple clicks, and searches result in a significant amount of useful information.

For example, let’s look at my patient who needed to know if her insurance would cover for the varenicline prescription I had written—and if so, how much was her co-pay? Using Fingertip Formulary®, I entered the name of the drug (brand or generic name), the state in which the patient was covered (even more important to me in that I practice near the border of two states), and then was prompted to choose from a plethora of either Medicare or non-Medicare healthcare plans. Once I selected a plan, the website listed the level of coverage for the drug, including the formulary tier in which it was covered, whether a quantity limit existed or a prior authorization was needed, and other possible requirements. Additionally, direct links to the healthcare plans’ online formularies were listed (if available). These links are helpful if a preferred formulary drug

is required first (known as Step Therapy), and often will provide direct links to available medication websites if this information is needed.

In a matter of minutes, I was able to inform my patient that her insurance would cover the varenicline prescription as a tier-3 drug on the formulary (correlating to a higher co-pay), and that a prior authorization would be needed. We were able to download this prior authorization form and fill it out in advance, thus saving time and effort for the staff, patient, and me.

Fingertip Formulary® is owned and operated by Decision Resources, Inc., and is one of several companies in this parent group aimed at a specific part of the healthcare industry. Fingertip Formulary® is updated monthly to provide the most accurate information available. Registration is not required to use the site, but it does allow the user access to additional features, such as saving a “quick list” of those medications or formularies most often used. For those who prefer using mobile devices, free downloadable applications of Fingertip Formulary® are available for personal digital assistants like Palm and PocketPC and smartphones like Blackberry and iPhone.

## Patients in Need

My area of practice includes a large population of indigent

patients, some of whom do not have adequate insurance. Therefore, finding a PAP that may help my patients gain access to the medications they need is extremely important. NeedyMeds is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization founded in 1997 to help indigent patients and their advocates get information about PAPs at no cost. Their free website (<http://www.needymeds.org>) is the face of the organization, and funding is provided by a multitude of sources, including small grants, ads on the homepage, and revenue from the sale of PAPERx Tracker, a software product that helps practices track their patients' medication PAP. No registration is required for NeedyMeds, and the site is easy to navigate, making it accessible to both the patient and provider.

NeedyMeds has helped me overcome the barrier of inadequate health insurance for many of my patients by providing a single point of contact for assistance with medications and general care for the indigent or underinsured. NeedyMeds has a searchable database of medications (by generic or brand name) that leads to an accurate list of PAPs. The site then lists the name of the program or programs (more than one program may be available), eligibility criteria (e.g., no prescription drug coverage, income limits,

etc.), direct links to PAP websites, and, if available, links to downloadable online patient assistance applications. Alternatively, PAPs are searchable by the name of the pharmaceutical company, program, disease state, or through a database of online PAP applications.

NeedyMeds offers its own discount prescription drug card, links to other discount prescription drug cards and medication coupons, and links to local organizations that offer assistance with the application process "in person," organized by city and state. Also available on this site are databases of governmental assistance programs, pediatric specific programs, disease-based programs, and locations of free/low-cost clinic sites. Overall, this website comprehensively covers all aspects of patient assistance for those in need of medications and indigent medical care and provides it in a user-friendly fashion with accurate and routinely updated information.

### Billing Code Shortcuts

Considerable time is needed for obtaining billing codes through the Internal Classification of Diseases, 9th Edition, Clinical Modification (ICD-9-CM) code book. I have found that quickly searching for an ICD-9 code on [ICD9.chrisendres.com](http://icd9.chrisendres.com) (<http://icd9.chrisendres.com>) is much more efficient.

No registration is required for this free website, which offers searchable ICD-9 and procedure codes organized in tabular or alphabetical lists. Other resources on the site, although not necessarily pertinent to most oncology practices, include an index to external causes of injury and an index to poisoning and external causes of adverse effects drugs and other chemical substances. This site does not currently provide a downloadable mobile application, which may be a limitation for clinicians who prefer to access the internet through mobile devices.

Certainly, we all want to take the best care of our patients possible. In today's healthcare setting, comprehensive cancer care includes a significant amount of paperwork, coding, formulary searching, prior authorizations, and other medical "hoop-jumping." Nonetheless, as advanced practitioners, we must continue to adapt to these circumstances and persist in finding tools, such as those highlighted here, that help us gain access to the information we need to help our patients get what *they* need.

*Ms. Greene is an oncology nurse practitioner at Blue Ridge Medical Specialists, PC, in Bristol, Tennessee. She reports no conflicts of interest.*



**Are there topics you would like to see addressed in the *Tools & Technology* section? We'd like to hear from you! Please send your suggestions to [editor@advancedpractitioner.com](mailto:editor@advancedpractitioner.com).**