A Powerful (and Low-Cost) “Pill” in the Fight Against Overuse of Antibiotics

We all know that antibiotics don’t work against a cold, the flu or other virus-born ailments. But the misuse continues -- with grave consequences. A 2012 study of almost 1,000 patients and their providers may have found a solution.

The study found that when the providers signed a letter agreeing to more judicious use of antibiotics, then displaying a poster of that pledge on the exam room wall (replete with the provider’s photograph) the rate of prescribing antibiotics for viral respiratory infections dropped almost 10 percent from the providers’ baseline rate.

It dropped almost 20 percent from the control group, which had no poster and whose rates spiked during cold and flu season.

This could mean an annual savings of 2.6 million RX and $70 million drug cost.

Source: “Nudging Guideline-Concordant Antibiotic Prescribing: A Randomized Trial”, a study of 954 patients at Los Angeles clinics; by corresponding author Daniella Meeker, PhD, RAND Corporation, et al. See the full study here. Published in the Jan. 27 issue of JAMA Internal Medicine.