* **Red Flag:** A patient mentioned during the visit, without being asked, that he had not followed-up with an appointment to his pulmonologist as planned and ordered by his PCP.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not comment or ask the patient if something in his life circumstances had prevented him from following-up with the pulmonologist. Missed opportunity to prevent future missed appointments.
* **Red Flag:** A provider mentioned to the Veteran that he noticed, looking at the record, that the he hadn’t come in for an appointment in over the year he even though he was advised to do so.
* **No Probe:** The patient didn’t respond and the provider did not ask the patient why he hadn’t come in for a visit within the recommended time frame (e.g. was he seeing a non-VA provider? Or was a job or financial hardship making it difficult?)
* **Red Flag:** When the physician recommended the patient start using a cane or walker, the patient declined, saying they didn’t want either.
* **No Probe:** The physician did not ask the patient why he declined, when doing so is a matter of safety (e.g. Did he feel embarrassed to use one? And/or, did he not understand that it is a matter of safety?)
* **Red Flag:** A patient mentioned that he was not checking his blood sugars at home as he knew he was supposed to.
* **No Probe:** The physician did not ask him why. Was he having trouble with the equipment? Had he run out of strips? Did he have a job or some other activity that interferred?
* **Red Flag:** A patient with high blood pressure stated that he had run out of his blood pressure medication.
* **No Probe:** The physician did not ask the patient why he had allowed his medications to run out and simply reordered them in CPRS. It’s possible that the patient is unclear about what he’s supposed to do and that it will happen again. This is a commonly heard situation.
* **Red Flag:** A patient stated that they only eat “what I can afford.”
* **No Probe:** The physician did not ask the Veteran to explain further. It appears that their financial situation is complicating their managing their health and health care.
* **Red Flag:** A patient complained that he had been waiting over four months for an appointment in integrative care (including acupuncture) for management of chronic pain since his physician put in the referral.
* **No Probe:** The physician did not respond to the complaint to try to figure out why the patient had been waiting so long or to see whether they could do anything to expedite access.
* **Red Flag:** A patient declined to get recommended compression stockings stating, “I’d fall on my face before I’d wear those!”
* **No Probe:** The provider did not follow up to see why the patient seemed embarrassed about stockings. Did he associate “stockings” with women’s clothes? Was he concerned he’d have to rely on others to put them on? This was a missed opportunity to see if his concerns could be addressed so that he could benefit from wearing them.
* **Red Flag:** During an outpatient visit, the physician commented that the patient had not refilled a prescribed medication and should have run out of it if taking it as prescribed.
* **No Probe:** The physician did not ask the patient, specifically, why he hadn’t refilled the medication and just reordered it. This was a missed opportunity to see if the patient understood how to order his medications. It’s possible he was taking it incorrectly and that’s why he hadn’t run out. It’s also possible that the patient didn’t know how to order the medications.
* **Red Flag:** While his vitals were being checked for a routine appointment, a patient mentioned that he had been experiencing an usually painful sore throat for more than two weeks, that he’d never had it before.
* **No Probe:** The nurse did not ask the patient why he hadn’t contacted a medical professional earlier for the emergent condition. It’s possible that the patient didn’t know that he could come to the VA for urgent care.
* **Red Flag:** A patient declined to get a recommended colonoscopy.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask the patient why he did not want a colonoscopy. Missed opportunity to find out if the patient had contextual issues that could be addressed such as a misunderstanding of what a colonoscopy entails.
* **Red Flag:** A patient’s blood pressure, previously controlled, was 148/71.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask if anything in the patient’s life circumstances was impacting his ability to manage his blood pressure. Missed opportunity to see if the patient was having difficulty taking his medications as prescribed.
* **Red Flag:** A patient’s blood pressure reading was 154/80.
* **No Probe:** The provider did ask the patient if something in his life circumstances was impacting his ability to manage his blood pressure before increasing the dosage. Missed opportunity to see if something in the patient’s life circumstances was affecting his ability to manage his care that could be addressed.
* **Red Flag:** A patient mentioned that he was not taking his prescribed atorvastatin.
* **No Probe:** The provider didn’t ask him why. The fact that the patient brought this up on his own suggests there is some obstacle or issue. Could it be side effects? Could there be some complicating life circumstance? For instance are the meds not arriving in the mail? Does the patient not know how to refill them?
* **Red Flag:** When the provider recommended a colonoscopy the patient said he didn’t want one.
* **No Probe:** The provider didn’t ask the patient why. Does the patient have a misconception about what’s involved?
* **Red Flag:** A patient with diabetes mention during the visit that he hasn’t been checking his blood sugars levels at home even they’d planned for him to do it.
* **No Probe:** The provider didn’t ask the patient why. Did the patient’s comment indicate that something in his life circumstances is interfering with his ability to check his blood sugar readings at home? For instance, does the patient have issues with their glucometer?
* **Red Flag:** A patient who has been getting up many times during the night stated that he was not taking is prescribed tamsulosin.
* **No Probe:** The provider didn’t ask the patient why and simply stated, “You should take it!” It’s possible that something in the patient’s life is interfering with his ability to take his medication and he will continue to miss doses if that issue is not addressed.
* **Red Flag:** The provider recommended an HIV screen and the Veteran declined.
* **No Probe:** The provider didn’t explore why and simply stated, “It’s up to you.” It’s possible that the patient has either a misconception about the test or a misconception about the disease, including that it can be treated. Missed opportunity to potentially address them.
* **Red Flag:** A patient asked for the results of an MRI that had occurred weeks ago, saying he never heard what it showed.
* **No Probe:** The provider gave the information but didn’t explore why the patient hadn’t received the results of his MRI. It’s possible that the patient’s contact information is incorrect in CPRS and he isn’t receiving other important information from the VA.
* **Red Flag:** A patient stated that he had been so ill for over two weeks that he had been unable to eat (only liquids) – yet he had not sought medical care or advice.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask the patient why he hadn’t sought medical care when he had been so ill. Perhaps he didn’t know the VA has an emergency room, or urgent care visits. It’s also possible that he has a long drive and didn’t realize he could be seen at a CBOC (VA Clinic) closer to his home.
* **Red Flag:** A Veteran suffered serious injury to his hand three weeks prior and did not seek medical assistance.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not inquire why the patient did not seek medical attention after being injured. Missed opportunity to explore if there were remediable factors affecting the patient’s ability to access healthcare.
* **Red Flag:** A patient mentioned that he had not received his medications in the mail.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not explore possible reasons the patient didn’t receive his medications such as making sure the correct address was in the system or that the medications had been properly ordered.
* **Red Flag:** A Veteran mentioned, without being asked, that he was not checking his blood pressure readings at home anymore.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not inquire why the patient was not checking his blood pressure readings at home. Missed opportunity to explore if there were remediable factors affecting the patient’s ability to manage his health (e.g. could the cuff be broken?).
* **Red Flag:** A patient’s record showed that he had visited urgent care four times in the past four months.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask the patient why he wasn’t seeing his primary care provider instead of going to urgent care.
* **Red Flag:** A patient mentioned during the visit that he had stopped taking his medication because he had run out.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask the patient why he had run out of medication. Missed opportunity to prevent future unnecessary lapses in medication adherence.
* **Red Flag:** A patient’s blood pressure reading was 156/76.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask if anything in the patient’s life circumstances was impacting his ability to manage his blood pressure. Missed opportunity to see if the patient was having difficulty taking his medications as prescribed or unable to follow the recommended diet.
* **Red Flag:** A patient, who was confused about his medications and the dietary guidelines, did not attend a diabetes class as had been agreed upon and scheduled at a previous visit.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask the patient why he didn’t follow through. Missed opportunity to explore if there are factors in the patient’s life situation affecting their ability to attend the class (e.g. are they having difficulty with transportation or do they have competing responsibilities?).
* **Red Flag:** A patient with COPD who had said he had some shortness of breath, mentioned that he was not using his prescribed inhaler.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask the patient why he wasn’t using his inhaler given his symptoms. Missed opportunity to explore if there are factors in the patient’s life situation affecting his ability or desire to take his medication as prescribed (e.g. do they understand its benefits? Is there a cost issue? Does he know how to refill it?).
* **Red Flag:** A patient’s A1C was higher than goal (9.8).
* **No Probe:** The provider asked what insulin dosage the patient was prescribed -- but not whether he was taking it as directed -- before increasing the prescribed dosage. Missed opportunity to assess adherence and whether anything in the Veterans life circumstances was impacting their ability to manage their diabetes (including whether they were able to follow a recommended diet).
* **Red Flag:** The patient mentioned that he was not taking his blood pressure medication.
* **No Probe:** The doctor did not asked the patient why. They did renew it, though. Missed opportunity to assess adherence and whether anything in the Veterans life circumstances was impacting their ability to manage their medications.
* **Red Flag:** The patient had been to the ER/Urgent Care clinic 9 times in the past four months.
* **No Probe:** The resident physician did not ask if there was a reason the patient was coming to the ER/Urgent Care Clinic so often. It’s possible that this patient didn’t know how to schedule appointments with his primary care provider and was relying on the availability of walk-in appointments.
* **Red Flag:** A patient missed 61% of his appointments in the past year.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not comment or ask the patient why he had missed so many appointments. Missed opportunity to explore if there are factors in the patient’s life situation preventing him from getting to his appointments (e.g. Does he have transportation? Is there a cost issue?).
* **Red Flag:** A patient’s A1C was 9.6.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask the patient if anything in his life circumstances was affecting his ability to manage his diabetes, instead just telling him he needed to do a bed job with his diabetes. Missed opportunity to explore possible contextual factors that could be addressed in the plan of care (e.g. Did the patient have diabetic supplies? Does the patient understand and is he following his medical regimen?).
* **Red Flag:** A patient mentioned that he’d run out of his prescribed medication.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not respond to ask why. This was a missed opportunity to explore whether there are factors in the patient’s life situation affecting his ability to renew his medications (e.g. Is there a cost issue? Does he not know how to reorder medications? Has he been distracted for some reason?).
* **Red Flag:** A patient lost a significant amount of weight since his last visit.
* **No Probe:** While the provider considered biomedical causes, they did not ask the patient if anything in his life circumstances was affecting his ability to secure food. This was a missed opportunity to explore possible contextual factors that could be affecting his weight (e.g. Did the patient have money for food? Did the patient lose social support to help prepare meals?).
* **Red Flag:** A patient did not return his FIT card (*fecal immunochemical test* for colon cancer) after agreeing to the test instead of a colonoscopy at a prior visit.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask the patient why he hadn’t returned the FIT test. It’s possible that the patient is unclear about what he’s supposed to do, has changed his mind, or has forgotten about it.
* **Red Flag:** A patient missed two appointments to podiatry within four months that the physician recommended (probably due to diabetes).
* **No Probe:** The provider commented that the patient had missed the appointments and said he should reschedule, but did not ask the patient why. The patient didn’t comment. Perhaps there is some confusion about when or where to go, or the patient didn’t follow what his provider was saying. Without asking the patient what is going on, he may keep missing them.
* **Red Flag:** A patient being treated for benign prostatic hypertrophy (BPH) mentioned that he had run out of Tamsulosin and so was not currently taking it.
* **No Probe:** The provider didn’t ask why the patient had run out of his medication or how he was faring while not taking it. Without asking what was going on, the provider may have missed an opportunity to ascertain if the patient actually needs the medication or whether there is some challenge to getting it refilled.
* **Red Flag:** A 64 year old patient who had his only colonoscopy when he turned 50, had declined several recently.
* **No Probe:** The provider didn’t ask the patient why. This was a missed opportunity to see if there was something in the patient’s life circumstances that was preventing him from getting another one. It’s possible the patient didn’t have anyone to drive him home afterwards, or that the thought he only needed one in a lifetime, or that he had a bad experience the first time.
* **Red Flag:** A patient with high blood pressure stated that he had run out of his blood pressure medication and had no refills, so he’d stopped taking them.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask the patient why he had allowed his medication to run out and simply reordered them in CPRS. It’s possible that the patient is unclear about what he’s supposed to do and that it will happen again. This is a commonly heard situation.
* **Red Flag:** A patient on long term potassium supplementation mentioned that he’d stopped taking it.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask the patient why he stopped without checking with his provider. It’s possible that the patient is unclear about why he is taking potassium and the risks of discontinuing on his own.
* **Red Flag:** A patient on blood pressure medication was not at his blood pressure goal at his visit.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask the patient if he was taking his blood pressure medication as prescribed before increasing the dosage. Missed opportunity to see if the patient was having difficulty taking his medications. It’s possible the patient isn’t taking his medications as prescribed or that he ran out of them early and didn’t know how to reorder them.
* **Red Flag:** A patient well over 50 years of age had never had a colonoscopy.
* **No Probe:** The provider simply asked the patient if he had a family history of colon cancer, but did not ask if there was a reason he hadn’t had a colonoscopy, and didn’t ask if he wanted one, apparently concluding the patient would not be interested. It’s possible that the patient has some issue that could be resolved, like a misunderstanding about the test, or a barrier, e.g. no one to drive him home.
* **Red Flag:** When asked, a middle aged patient with diabetes revealed he had not had an eye exam in several years.
* **No Probe:** The provider put in a referral but did not ask the patient if there was a reason he hadn’t seen the eye doctor in so long. It’s possible that the patient doesn’t know he is supposed to have his eyes examined yearly for any possible changes due to his diabetes.
* **Red Flag:** A patient with symptomatic respiratory issues comments three separate times that he is “supposed” to take a daily inhaler.
* **No Probe:** The physician did not ask the patient if he was, in fact, using the inhaler daily. If the provider had asked, they might have discovered something in the patient’s life circumstances that could be addressed. For instance, this patient might not be using the inhaler on a daily basis because he cannot afford the copay on the inhaler. Without following up on this clue, the provider is missing an opportunity to see if the patient is taking his medications as prescribed. Even though the provider is a specialist, they have uncovered a symptomatic and treatable condition that is effecting the patient’s overall well being.
* **Red Flag:** A patient with high blood pressure mentioned that he’d run out of his blood pressure medication with no refills, so he’d stopped taking them.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask the patient why, and simply reordered them in CPRS. It’s possible that the patient is unclear about what he’s supposed to do when he runs out of refills and that it will happen again. This is a commonly heard situation.
* **Red Flag:** The patient missed over 75% of his scheduled appointments in the past year.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask why. Missed opportunity to see if the patient has transportation issues or competing responsibilities (like caring for an ailing spouse), or a new phone number, or any other contextual factor that could be addressed in a care plan.
* **Red Flag:** A patient being treated for diabetes reported having an episode of low blood sugar (finger stick of 51).
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask the patient what was going on at the time of the low blood sugar reading. The provider asked the patient if he had an upcoming appointment with endocrinology and told him to discuss it then. It’s possible that the patient is unclear about insulin dosing in relation to meals and that the issue could be addressed at this visit.
* **Red Flag:** At a scheduled routine visit a patient mentioned he’d been having daily diarrhea for two months, a problem he’d not had before. He had not sought medical help.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask the patient why they hadn’t contacted a medical professional for such significant symptoms. Missed opportunity to correct any barriers or a misunderstanding about how and when to seek care.
* **Red Flag:** A patient with heart disease mentioned that he had experienced chest pains recently that went away. He commented that he did not go to the emergency room although he knew he was supposed to.
* **No Probe:** The provider did not ask the patient why. Was it that he feared what they might find? Or was it something practical like not having transportation or fear of leaving his job. Missed opportunity to potentially prevent this from happening again.
* **Red Flag:** While having his vitals checked, the patient declined both the flu and shingles vaccines.
* **No Probe:** The nurse did not ask the patient why he was declining recommended vaccines. Motivational interviewing includes the Ask-Tell-Ask framework:
  + Ask: I understand you don't want the influenza shot today. Can you help me understand why not? Do you mind if I share some information with you about the vaccine?”
  + Tell: Respond with information centered on the patient's belief or question.
  + Ask: “What are your thoughts now about getting a flu shot?”

(Fogarty et al. FPM 2017;24)