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Navigating the Complexities of Patient Care With Digital and Human Touchpoints



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As the saying goes, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." This familiar adage applies to every patient who has ever received a diagnosis that sets into motion a complex healthcare journey. Patients who have received a cancer diagnosis or are managing one or more chronic conditions or a rare disease — along with their family members and other caregivers — require many forms of effective and empathetic support to help them navigate all of the ups and downs associated with managing today's complex and costly specialty therapy regimens.

Fortunately, drug manufacturers and the third-party service providers they engage are increasingly working to keep patient needs and concerns top of mind as they develop and carry out a multitude of support programs to support the launch and use of specialty medications in the marketplace. The goal of such partnerships is to devise thoughtful wraparound support programs — and fine-tune them over time using data-driven insights — to help patients, their families and caregivers to overcome every foreseeable obstacle they may encounter along the way.

During such endeavors, it is important for all stakeholders to truly understand how today's patients and providers are consuming information, managing the complexities associated with today's specialty therapies and completing daily tasks that are required to get on therapy as quickly as possible and stay on therapy for as long as needed. Such efforts will help the pharma brand team and its partner to tailor the optimal mix of digital and human interventions when devising the program.

And importantly, when developing wraparound programs for their specialty therapies, drug companies should not be afraid to experiment with innovative

program elements that may be different from their competitors' offerings in the same therapeutic space. The goal is to create the most effective and cost-efficient solutions to support the brand and the patient rather than just repeating existing practices.



Three key objectives guide program development

Patients taking branded therapies to manage long-term health conditions are faced with a dizzying array of challenges, all of which can hinder access to medication, create affordability challenges and undermine long-term adherence objectives. State-of-the-art wraparound support programs must be devised to help patients and their caregivers overcome all of these logistical and administrative hurdles.

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Access

Even when the prescriber has selected a given therapy for a patient, several factors can create delays or even barriers that can thwart the physician's ability to get the patient on therapy. These may include formulary tier status, prior authorization or step therapy requirements, labor-intensive coverage appeals and more. Similarly, the network of specialty pharmacies managing oncology treatments and other specialty medications has narrowed in recent years. Working with specialty pharmacies to enable swift delivery of prescribed therapies often requires intervention by skilled experts. To help streamline the prescribing process, the wraparound program should both embed digital tools effectively into the physician's workflow and provide easy access to experts who can jump in when needed.

Affordability

Today's specialty therapies are costly, and patients with high-deductible health plans often face steep out-of-pocket costs. These can mount quickly for those who must remain on therapy for months or years. Accordingly, support programs should aim to streamline the process of finding alternative options that could make medications affordable. A well-designed blend of digital tools and trained specialists (who can provide the logistical and emotional support needed) can help to close the affordability gap by helping patients to maximize plan reimbursement, investigate and enroll in alternative co-pay assistance and charitable Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs) options and more.

Adherence

It is widely recognized that a one-size-fits-all approach to adherence never works — particularly with regard to high-cost specialty medications used to manage chronic health conditions. Individual patients face different adherence challenges and have different communication preferences, motivations and personal triggers that influence their behavior. Meanwhile, many of today's specialty therapies involve complex dosing regimens or require at-home administration via self-injectable devices. Without proper support, these aspects can make reliable at-home use difficult. Side effects and adverse events can also threaten long-term adherence to therapy. By providing a thoughtful mix of digital scaffolding and personalized support, a thoughtful wraparound program can help patients and their caregivers to take ownership of their responsibilities and optimize outcomes.



Programs must balance high-tech with high-touch to address patient needs

Today's consumers are increasingly tech savvy in terms of using mobile devices, apps, websites and other digital tools to do everything from ordering goods and services online to booking physician appointments to consuming information and entertainment. Technology also plays a growing role throughout pharma and healthcare. While many consumers enjoy growing comfort using digital tools, when it comes to supporting complex specialty medications, such offerings are not enough. For instance, digital tools alone can never replace the empathetic support that comes when a highly trained case manager can get involved quickly to help patients and physicians navigate complex administrative challenges and other issues related to medication access, affordability and adherence.

When devising the most impactful support programs, pharmaceutical companies and their service provider partners must identify the right balance among all of the options:

- **HIGH-TECH PROGRAM ELEMENTS** rely on technology-based solutions to both automate and streamline repetitive tasks. Such digital interventions — which may include electronic benefit verification, streamlined patient enrollment into a product hub, co-pay assistance and more — give patients and their caregivers a greater sense of self-sufficiency and enable streamlined digital communications and the capture of data that can be leveraged later to inform ongoing program improvements and verify the return on investment (ROI) for the overall effort.
- **HIGH-TOUCH PROGRAM ELEMENTS** are especially important to help patients and their caregivers understand and resolve complex aspects associated with their chronic condition or their prescribed therapy. These aspects of any wraparound support program give stakeholders access to caring, compassionate, highly trained specialists — who can pick up the phone and interact with physicians, payers and specialty pharmacies, helping patients to effectively navigate the processes, paperwork and protocols associated with a particular specialty therapy. Such experts may include Field Reimbursement Managers, Field Deployment Teams, Clinical Nurse Educators and more. By automating and streamlining those tasks that patients can manage on their own, the program will make best use of these higher-cost trained specialists.





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When investing in the optimal balance of digital and human assets, the pharma brand team can help patients replace hopelessness with hope and drive sustained adherence to therapy and improved clinical outcomes over time. Meanwhile, such efforts will continue to improve the overall ROI for the program.



Choosing the best partner

Where possible, pharmaceutical companies should partner with a single, experienced service provider — rather than engaging a patchwork of siloed vendors that may have conflicting priorities, yielding a support program riddled with gaps and inefficiencies. By design, the most appropriate partner will have broad and deep expertise and a well-established infrastructure to support both digital and human program elements.

In deploying the wraparound support program, such a partner should function as a single point of contact and act as an extension of the company, using its vast and deep experience — coupled with strategic data analytics — to develop, inform and validate the chosen patient-centric strategies and use data-driven insights to fine-tune the program over time.

In this context, the third-party service provider puts a lot of skin in the game — bringing expertise, operational excellence and critical infrastructure. The overarching goal is to drive a cohesive brand experience and ensure maximum impact for patients and providers. At the end of the day, an expertly executed support program yields direct benefit to the pharmaceutical company's bottom line, in terms of helping to maximize sales and market share and distinguishing the drug in a crowded therapeutic space, thereby improving brand reputation among both patients and prescribers.

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About EVERSANA™



EVERSANA is the leading provider of global commercialization services to the life sciences industry. The company's integrated solutions are rooted in the patient experience and span all stages of the product life cycle to deliver long-term, sustainable value for patients, providers, channel partners and payers. The company serves more than 500 organizations, including innovative start-ups and established pharmaceutical companies, to advance life sciences services for a healthier world. To learn more about EVERSANA, visit EVERSANA.COM or connect through [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).

