

# Keeping Health Care *Connected*

Surescripts is going beyond e-prescribing  
to support pharmacists



surescripts



*See an interview video with Tom Skelton at America's Pharmacist online ([www.americaspharmacist.net](http://www.americaspharmacist.net)).*



**Tom Skelton, CEO of Surescripts.**

More than a decade ago, NCPA partnered with other organizations to build a nationwide health information network and replace paper prescriptions with electronic ones.

Today, Surescripts' ever-expanding network has developed well beyond e-prescribing, and in 2015, transmitted nearly 10 billion secure health messages between pharmacists, physicians, and pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs).

In the following interview, CEO Tom Skelton talks about how Surescripts helps pharmacists spend less time on administrative tasks and more time helping patients improve their health—all while solving the “value equation.”

**Q: Pharmacists are playing a more visible and active role in care coordination. What is Surescripts doing to make things more efficient and digitized for us?**

**A:** Surescripts has always been in the connectivity game, with routing e-prescriptions as a first use case. We were focused on two of pharmacists' top priorities—quality and accuracy—long before there was widespread adoption or legislation. Today, we have new capabilities like RxChange. It gets pharmacists off the phone and working within the e-prescribing workflow when recommending a different drug or a generic due to patient concerns (such as allergies or contraindications) or addressing formulary management (such as step therapy or prior authorization) or inventory issues. We also have Clinical Direct Messaging to improve medication management, address controlled substance abuse, and align medication-related goals before and after surgery. We encourage any pharmacy interested in exploring CDM to contact Surescripts and their pharmacy IT vendor. So, we're definitely giving pharmacists more powerful tools to coordinate care. And because our solutions operate right within the e-prescribing workflow, pharmacists can redirect that administrative time back to patient care.

**Q: What is Surescripts doing to improve e-prescribing quality and value for both pharmacy owners and patients?**

**A:** Incomplete or inaccurate data in an electronic prescription causes disruption, inconvenience and potentially much worse. We've heard from our pharmacy partners that one in 10 prescriptions requires manual intervention. This is not acceptable to us, and we're focused on reducing the error rate to zero. We've rallied partners from all sides of the industry—pharmacies, pharmacy IT vendors, electronic health record (EHR) companies and drug compendia—to understand the pain points and identify areas of improvement (prescription accuracy, process improvements, adoption acceleration and directory integrity). And we're really excited about our new data quality engine that automates key aspects of prescription quality monitoring. It's on track to measure more than 1.5 billion transactions by July 2017—a huge improvement over the very limited manual sampling of the past. So, our truly unique industry collaboration, plus a modernized tracking system, are creating the quality and value pharmacists expect and deserve.

**Q: What about the cost of e-prescribing?**

**A:** We acknowledge that cost is an important variable in the equation: Value = Quality/Cost. Our industry-wide quality program is driving real change across the e-prescribing ecosystem. Since 2012, we've improved e-prescription quality by 38 percent. And we're reducing cost through our annual e-prescribing rebate program. It's a tangible sign of our commitment to higher quality and lower cost. From 2009 to 2015, the rebate program—combined with direct price reductions and billing policy changes—reduced e-prescribing transaction fees for all retail pharmacies by an average of 64 percent.

**Q: What is Surescripts doing to help drive the adoption of electronic prescribing for controlled substances (EPCS) to fight diversion and the prescription drug abuse epidemic?**

**A:** Today, at least 80 percent of the world's opioids are consumed in the United States ([www.asipp.org/documents/ASIPPFactSheet101111.pdf](http://www.asipp.org/documents/ASIPPFactSheet101111.pdf)). Prescription fraud and abuse costs the nation \$272 billion annually, and prescription opioid overdose killed 28,000 Americans in 2014. But until a few years ago, EPCS was not legal in many states. So, we worked with the boards of pharmacy, other interested stakeholders, and state legislatures to legalize it in all 50 states and Washington, D.C. As of November 2016, nearly 90 percent of pharmacies were EPCS-enabled. So, pharmacists are already taking a critical step in fixing the problem. A strong and secure network utilizing two-factor identification as required by the Drug Enforcement Administration can have a direct impact on keeping patients safe. EPCS makes it more difficult to commit prescription fraud but easier for providers to responsibly prescribe an appropriate

amount of a drug. We're proud to be major proponents of EPCS with our resource site [www.getepcs.com](http://www.getepcs.com), a simple and informative tool to help prescribers get started with EPCS. And we teamed up with the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) to build awareness among its 125,000 members.

**Q: Beyond e-prescribing, how is Surescripts planning to deliver value to independent pharmacists in the next three years?**

**A:** To reduce the administrative headaches caused by prior authorization, we have three key offerings—CompleEPA®, our CompleEPA portal for prescribers and RxChange—designed to meet the full range of electronic prior authorization needs.

CompleEPA, our electronic prior authorization solution that integrates directly with prescribers' EHRs, replaces faxes and phone calls, and helps prevent unpleasant surprises at the pharmacy. This optimal solution delivers prior authorization within minutes instead of days, and we are working with our EHR partners to drive adoption as quickly as possible.

For providers who don't yet have access to our fully integrated solution, we have a portal-based version of CompleEPA. It enables electronic prior authorization and delivers approval/denial results to the pharmacy. This means that prior authorizations won't require repeated check-ins for approval, and pharmacists can be confident about the status of their patients' medications.

Additionally, we're rolling out RxChange for prior authorization. With the click of a button within the pharmacy software workflow, pharmacies can alert the prescriber when a medication requires a prior authorization—no fax or phone call required.

This process also produces a return message to alert the pharmacy if a prior authorization was approved or denied. Naturally, this also results in a quicker and more convenient patient experience. We're just starting to offer this product to independent pharmacies, so check with your pharmacy software vendor to see when it will be available to you.

The rate of prescribing for specialty drugs is growing by 18 percent annually, and requires a complex and cumbersome administrative process. To address these issues, we have designed Specialty Patient Onboard to help pharmacies deliver these important medications more quickly and consistently by automating the intake process within the doctor's EHR.

Finally, with 10,000 people turning 65 every day, we're focusing on how to better serve the long-term and post-acute care (LTPAC) space. Through a single connection to Surescripts, pharmacies can access more than 95 percent of LTPAC EHRs, resulting in less maintenance, less development and easier, standards-based integrations. Hospital readmissions for Medicare patients alone cost \$26 billion annually. And while transaction standards exist for LTPAC, they are underutilized. Surescripts can help. By leveraging our core assets in e-prescribing, we can help reduce manual processes, improve medication inventory management and reduce adverse drug events—all while making LTPAC clinicians' jobs easier, and improving safety and comfort for LTPAC patients and their loved ones. ■

**Surescripts is working to not just perfect e-prescribing, but evolve far beyond the basics to deliver a safe, efficient and connected health care experience for all. Visit [www.surescripts.com](http://www.surescripts.com) or follow Surescripts on Twitter (@surescripts) for the latest news and updates.**