



Harnessing *the* **PATIENT-CARE** POWER *of* *Specialty Pharmacy*



Creating value for patients and a new asset for your business

by Tom Doyle

Independent pharmacists have always been the backbone of the U.S. health system, ensuring that patients across the country can access needed medicines and medical advice, when and where they need it.

Today, the shift toward personalized care and specialty medicine places independent pharmacists at the intersection of innovation and patient care. With an even greater role to play in connecting patients with the therapies they need to live fuller and healthier lives, understanding the complexities of specialty medications can unlock potential for greater patient convenience and better health outcomes, and, a new asset for your business.



SPECIALTY PHARMACY IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Health care today is in the midst of a significant change, with increased demand for improved patient care throughout the patient journey—including therapeutic approaches for the management of complex specialty conditions. Medicine is converging around the patient, seeking to interact more directly, to target disease more accurately, and to create more personalized care to support patients and the changing needs of our health care system.

As pharmacy products have transitioned from traditional small molecules to specialty products, patient manage-

ment has become more complex. For years, many specialty products were administered by a health care provider at a medical institution, outpatient infusion center, or physician's office, resulting in little coordination of care with community pharmacists. Today, though there is disagreement around the definition of 'specialty drug,' many payers place oral tablets or self-administered injections in the specialty tier, creating new responsibilities and access limits for pharmacists. Community pharmacists are well positioned to improve patient care through close working relationships with local health care providers, as well as offering improved patient support solutions such as same-day home delivery.

The goal of medicine is to help people live fuller and healthier lives, and not be tethered to doctor appointments and medical institutions. Achieving this vision of medical convenience requires partnership across the entire health care system, both upstream and downstream; diligently working with manufacturers, sites of care and pharmacies to make health care easier for patients.

MAXIMIZING VALUE WITH INTEGRATED DISTRIBUTION PARTNERS

Community pharmacists represent the link between product and patient, helping to improve the speed to therapy by eliminating access

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barriers, and improving adherence by coordinating the patient's care with service providers and local sites of care. To ensure equal and convenient access to medicines—no matter where the patient lives— independent pharmacies must consider how to create a more intimate relationship with the patient for the support of both traditional, small-molecule products and specialty drugs,

which require a much higher level of patient management.

By partnering with an integrated distribution and patient care solution provider that touches all points along the supply chain—from manufacturing facility to patient bedside— independent pharmacies can drive connectivity and create value for every patient need.

Large distributors are experts in managing and delivering huge quantities of products across the country for commonly prescribed therapies, which align with the need for mass distribution. However, a gap remains in how life-changing drugs reach the small, specialized patient population scattered across the country, in both rural and urban settings. These patients require greater access to specialty drugs that are distributed through limited networks, yet do not have high enough demand to warrant general distribution through all retail channels. This middle ground remains problematic for both patients seeking access to life-improving medicines, and manufacturers who seek to provide patients a higher-touch experience to improve compliance and outcomes.

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For example, consider patients suffering a recent heart attack, and their unique clinical needs. Even this condition, which, sadly, impacts a significant number of patients—some 90 million Americans—has a widely dispersed population. Perhaps only 900,000 would need a specific therapy in the course of a year, and they would certainly not be located in the same geographic area. Ensuring rapid access to products and coordinating patient care with local providers are vital links to ensuring each patient is managed appropriately.

Now, consider a rare disorder. These patients are even fewer and farther between—and with greater needs for patient support and coordination of care. The vital specialty drugs needed

to support this patient population are complex and expensive, and often needed immediately. Removing coverage barriers and ensuring affordability, along with accessibility, is critical for patients. The community pharmacist's role as patient manager and advisor becomes more complex, focusing on small numbers of patients and helping them understand how to handle, administer, and pay for all drugs required to support their therapy. By coordinating patient education and care while also ensuring that products are delivered and available when and where they're needed, community pharmacists provide a vital link in supporting patients through their treatment journey.

Specialty pharmacy is a complex endeavor with the patient at the center, requiring specialized knowl-

edge of the disease state and patient management requirements. The right distribution partner is critical.

COLLABORATING FOR BETTER CARE

Effective integrated distribution and patient care solution providers will align closely with independent pharmacies to support easy access to products and high-quality patient support services. With roots linked firmly to community pharmacy, quality companies will evolve their support solutions to meet the needs of the ever-changing health care market—including new service offerings to support pharmacy needs as the market has shifted toward increased patient support and specialty products.

Distribution partners should work closely with manufacturers seeking

to improve the patient experience for a wide range of brand and specialty products. Through patient support and reimbursement hubs, distribution partners can provide solutions that streamline the patient and health care provider experience by removing financial barriers, providing access to clinical support services, and aligning distribution requirements to ensure obstacles to patient access are minimized. The hub model approach relies on a digital platform that provides access to the patient's insurance coverage before they leave the site of care, enabling the patient to understand out-of-pocket costs and support programs to offset this expense, which, in turn, reduce prescription abandonment.

By linking a company's patient support hub to community pharmacies, the patient experience can be improved dramatically. In one example of how this approach might work, patients who had been discharged from the hospital after a heart attack required access to a new cardiac medicine within 24 hours. As a follow-up, the distribution partner's reimbursement hub team would work closely with the drug's manufacturer to develop a program that provides patients, caregivers, and site of care coordinators the tools to remove cost-related access barriers and ensure the patient can obtain the medication. Yet this is only one facet of "access." Even if reimbursement barriers are removed quickly, the ability to physically receive the first dose of medicine remains a challenge – the drug must be delivered to the patient's pharmacy of choice. By partnering with community pharmacies, the distribution partner developed a process to ensure the product was in stock at select stores across the country. This provided patients with improved options to obtain their medicine, which is crucial to the patient and caregiver experi-

ence at a time when the focus needs to center on the patient's health, and not navigating the complexity of the distribution channel.

In another program, a manufacturer sought to improve access and patient support services at the retail level for a high-priced specialty product. The product aided patients suffering from a rare disease that required ongoing patient counseling and coordination with local sites of care, including long-term care facilities. In this case, the challenge was not only one of distribution, but also, ensuring that different players along the supply chain continuum could communicate and connect with one another, so that the most up-to-date information was guiding patient care. By aligning numerous community pharmacy providers through a common technology platform, a strong link between the distributor, pharmacy, and site of care was created to improve patient outcomes and visibility of vital information to improve patient management.

SUPPORTING THE MISSION OF INDEPENDENT PHARMACIES

Forward-thinking, proactive, and innovative distribution partners will work to support independent pharmacies in their mission to provide patients with access to high quality care. Partners should help pharmacies deliver evenly distributed patient care, ensuring patients easy access to products and local coordination of care whenever possible.

Strong distribution partners should have as its collective mission to ensure that patients receive the best care possible, including the management of specialty diseases which require an intimate knowledge of the patient's individual needs.

By working with health care innovators with roots in independent

pharmacy, you can help support new patient care models, which help ensure your patients receive the best possible support on their treatment journey toward better health. ■

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