



Education, Communication and Compliance

Brand marketers can use treatment education programs to increase patient compliance and provide physicians important feedback – while also building brand loyalty.

By Paul LeVine

On the surface, it could not be simpler. A physician prescribes an effective drug, the patient follows the regimen as directed, and patient and physician see evidence of improvement in the patient's condition, giving the physician confidence to prescribe the drug more frequently. Upon closer examination, however, there are many places for this process to break down.

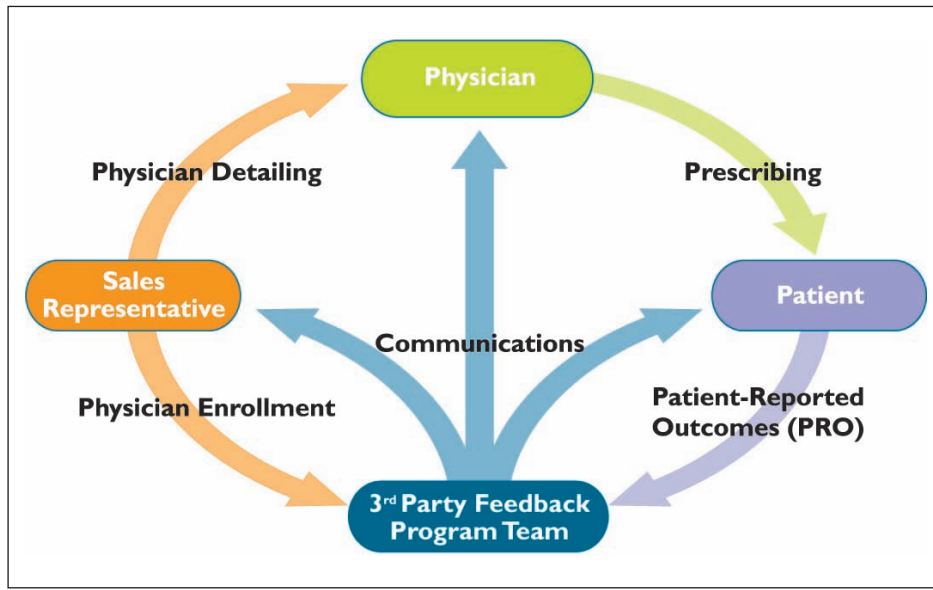
Too often, patients are reluctant or embarrassed to talk about their conditions with their physicians or to ask questions. Likewise, tight schedules generally don't allow doctors enough time to discuss much more than the diagnoses and treatments. As a result, a patient routinely leaves with a prescription to treat a condition – without knowing much about either.

Clearly, this is not the recipe for a successful treatment outcome.

Effective medical care requires treatment and condition education for patients combined with ongoing physician communication so that patients understand their conditions and medications, and physicians can monitor patient progress and intervene when necessary. By striving to implement better condition and treatment understanding from the beginning of the process, timely patient education clearly facilitates treatment compliance and results in better treatment outcomes.

Measuring impact of patient education

There are studies that support the idea that a program of effective treatment education and physician communication can improve drug therapy regimens and patient understanding of disease states.



Communication between patients and physicians is a key component of effective medical care.

For example, a study was conducted examining two separate treatment-experience programs involving more than 9,300 physicians and 37,700 patients being treated for hypertension (high blood pressure) or hypercholesterolemia (high cholesterol).

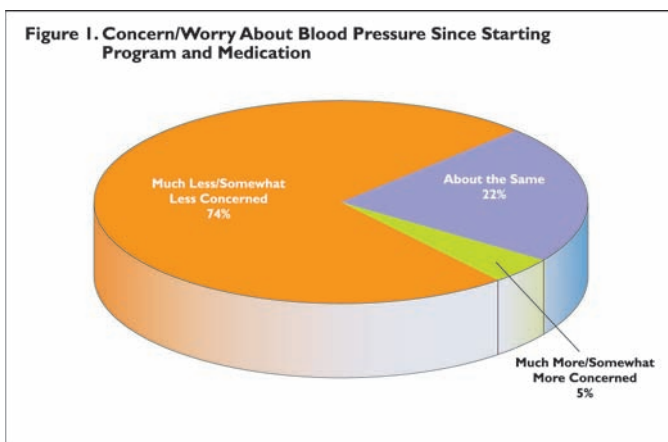
Physicians identified appropriate patients to receive treatment with an antihypertensive or cholesterol-reducing medication. Patients then voluntarily elected to receive educational information about their conditions and medications at the point-of-care and, through automated telephone surveys, responded to condition-specific questions about their understanding of the material and experience with treatments. Subsequently, the patient’s prescribing physician received real-time feedback about the patient’s responses in a confidential, graphical report.

The survey data supports the use of patient education and ongoing communication between physicians and their patients as a way to improve and monitor compliance with treatment regimens. In creating patient-physician dialogue through a treatment experience program, it is clear that patients better understand their conditions and prescriptions, which encourages stricter adherence and increased physician comfort in prescribing a specific drug.

Highlights from the survey

Among the key findings of this study:

- More than 95 percent of high cholesterol patients felt the program was helpful in educating them about how the medication improves cholesterol levels
- 47 percent of patients were much less concerned about their blood pressure after receiving condition and medication education
- The majority of patients, regardless of their conditions, reported taking their medications “all the time as prescribed”
- Since they knew what to expect, more than 90 percent of high cholesterol patients felt they were better able to manage the medication’s side effects



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Direct feedback for the physicians

A well-executed treatment experience program benefits not only the patient, but the physician and brand, too. Initiated by pharmaceutical companies, treatment experience programs first register doctors who treat a certain illness, and would

Patient education and improving the communication flow between physicians and their patients are tactics that can be used to improve and monitor compliance with treatment regimens.

be apt to prescribe medication to treat the condition. Once doctors are on board, it is up to them to select appropriate patients based on a range of criteria – age, sex and symptoms of the condition being the standard. By completing a simple baseline and follow-up survey, patient responses are then aggregated into graphical reports and sent to the prescribing physician.

These patient responses, and ultimately patient-reported outcomes (PROs), provide physicians with direct feedback on their patient's condition, treatment understanding and their response to the prescribed treatment. This first-hand feedback is of critical importance to physicians as they monitor patient progress on a new course of treatment.

Not only does it provide a “check-in” between office visits, but it also fosters patient-physician communication at follow-up appointments. By creating this open dialogue, patients better understand their conditions and treatments, and physicians feel more comfortable prescribing the same medication to other patients in the future. Thus, the value to the brand is clear. Once doctors are in their comfort zone with prescribing a particular drug, brands typically see increases in new prescriptions of about 35 percent.

While physicians can be skeptical about pharmaceutical marketing practices, they are generally favorably disposed to

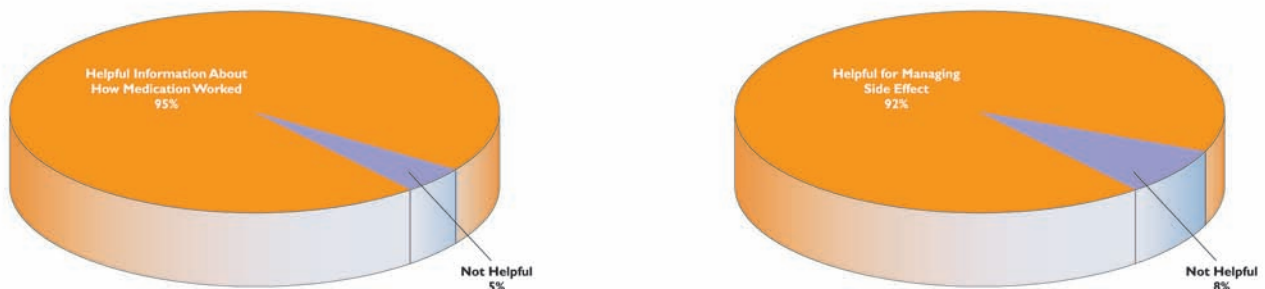
patient-support programs designed to help patients understand their condition and treatment – and that do not require a heavy commitment or resources from their office staff.

Physicians value patient-reported data

PROs, viewed in the context of clinical presentation, do play a role in the diagnosis and treatment of illness, and physicians are interested in programs and initiatives designed to give them relevant information about their own patients. Since only patients themselves are in a position to articulate how they feel, PROs are a vital part of effective medical care. While intuitively this information would seem to be of value to physicians, there has been precious little evidence demonstrating how physicians perceive and use patient-reported data in the course of clinical practice.

In a separate survey of 775 physicians participating in a treatment experience program for a dry-eye medication, more than 90 percent of survey respondents indicate that they incorporated the graphical feedback reports into their patients' charts. Here, too, PROs are at the center of the treatment experience program and the delivery of real-time, patient reported information that is quickly accessible, highly reliable and immediately actionable by their individual physician not only directly impacts patient care, but also the brand's ROI.

Figure 2. Helpfulness of Cholesterol Program



The majority of patients felt that the program was helpful in providing information about how the medication helps them manage their condition.

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Among the highlights of the physician survey:

- With 5 being the highest, 75 percent of physicians rated the usefulness of the report a 4 or 5
- 68 percent of physicians said they would discuss the report with the patient
- 66 percent of physicians said they would add the report to the patient file AND discuss it with the patient

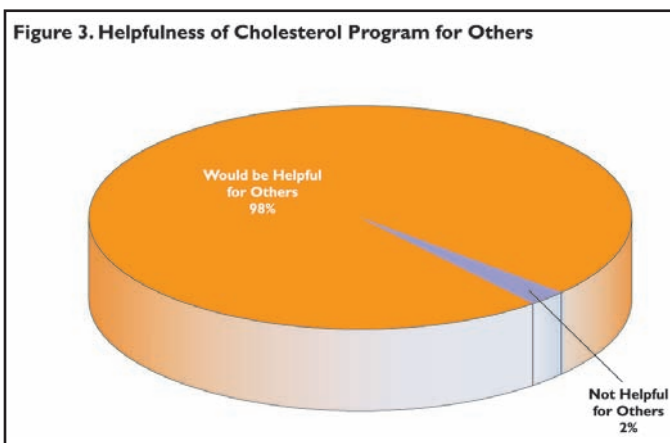
As the results show, patient-physician communication is the ultimate measure of success in pharmaceutical relationship marketing. In an environment dominated by consumer skepticism and regulatory scrutiny, treatment experience programs have a unique role to play. Because the value to the patient and physician is pre-eminent, the ethical standing of these programs is significantly higher than that of other explicitly promotional programs. For the same reasons, the brand loyalty is deeper and more sustained.

In order to correctly deliver these programs, physician concerns need to be completely understood to ensure that they support the initiatives and ask their patients to participate. This in turn places a responsibility on the sales representative

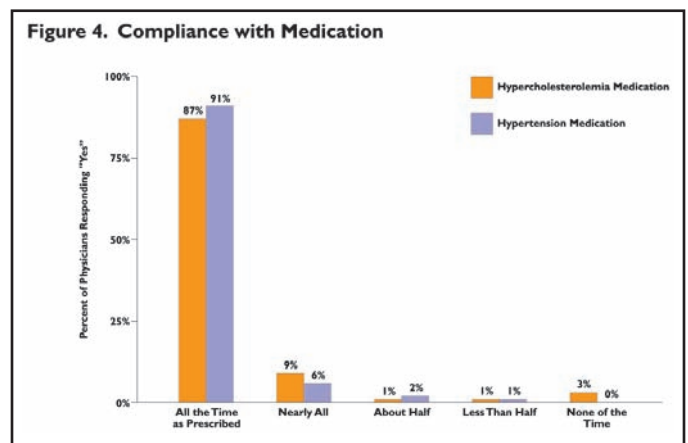
to sensibly articulate the program and its value to both the physicians and their patients.

Education combined with patient-physician communication is a key component of effective medical care. Educating patients may help promote treatment compliance, while supplementing clinical data with patient-reported feedback can aid physicians in monitoring patient progress. Proactively contributing to and measuring patient understanding help both patients and physicians become more comfortable with treatment regimens, thereby leading to increased drug sales and faster uptake. Time and again, doctors reinforce the value of feedback by preferring to prescribe a particular brand. ■

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Nearly all participants thought the program would be helpful to others.



Self-reported compliance was very high among participants.