

Patient feedback programs lower healthcare costs

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Pharmaceutical and managed care executives have a unique opportunity to work together to ensure that patients receive the most effective treatments available, while reducing payers' and overall healthcare costs.

One solution that can help managed care and pharma reduce healthcare costs, while positively impacting treatment outcomes, is the implementation of patient feedback programs. Such feedback programs help patients and doctors communicate about treatment experiences.

If these programs are executed correctly, they can educate patients about their medications, provide physicians with information about the effectiveness of the drugs they are prescribing within their own patient base, and facilitate patient-physician communication. Patient feedback programs have been known to lead to better adherence rates; more frequent, detailed patient-physician communication; fewer medical emergencies; increased use of pre-emptive medicine; and healthier patients overall.

Typically, pharma pays for the program to be implemented, and physicians are asked to participate either via sales reps or direct invitation. The physicians then encourage their appropriate patients to enroll.

Once the patient signs up for the program, surveys that are tailored for the medication and condition are conducted at specific intervals to determine how the patient is faring on the new medication. Along the course of these communications, patients are provided with necessary educational information about their disease state and new medication. The individual patient experience data that is collected is then sent to the prescribing physician.

The physician can then use this information as a tool to help start a conversation during the patient's next office visit. More importantly, it can also help raise awareness of appropriate prescribing decisions, highlight medications that are effective for certain patient types or identify potential problems or adherence barriers resulting from the prescribed treatment.

Payers and patients save money when patients communicate with their physicians and participate more fully in preventive medicine. In the end, this has been linked to a reduction in the prevalence of chronic disease complications and fewer claims for insurers.

Patient non-adherence costs billions of dollars each year. There are many reasons why patients are non-adherent. Sometimes they cannot afford their medications, don't think they need them, forget them or experience unexpected side effects. In almost all cases, adherence can be improved with greater patient education and patient-physician communication.

To put this in perspective, a new study reported in *The Journal of Applied Research in Clinical and Experimental Therapeutics* states that patient non-adherence results in an estimated \$8.5 billion in hospital costs every year. The same study shows that approximately 125,000 people with treatable ailments die in the U.S. each year because they do not take their medication properly, and about one-fourth of all nursing home admissions are related to improper self-administration of medicine.

The pharmaceutical industry has already begun to realize the benefits of patient feedback programs. These programs are viewed as "FDA-safe," and represent credible marketing initiatives that help educate patients and physicians about brand-specific drugs while increasing brand loyalty through the transparent messaging about the brand's efficacy.

In addition to improving patient health while reducing costs, patient feedback programs can also help ensure that each patient is being treated with medications that are effectively meeting their individual needs.

Another topic that seems to be trending upward is pay-for-performance arrangements. In fact, Merck and CIGNA reached an agreement in April in which Merck provides discounts to the insurer for the diabetes medication Januvia (or Janumet) based on the drugs' performance and subscribers' adherence. CIGNA pays less for its subscribers' diabetes medications and Merck incurs more sales through a built-in loyalty program.

A similar relationship can be achieved through the implementation of patient feedback programs. These programs offer credible, personalized educational information to patients and deliver individual feedback and new insights to physicians about the medications they prescribe. By providing patients and physicians with these additional resources, both pharma and managed healthcare providers can significantly impact overall patient health, thereby helping to reduce healthcare costs in the years ahead.

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