
SPECIALTY PHARMACY NEWS

News and Strategies for Managing High-Cost Specialty Products

Program Seeks to Simplify Patient, Provider Experiences

At a time when PBMs are pushing mail order, CVS Caremark Corp., while still hot on mail order, has added another option for people who need specialty drugs. Through its new Specialty Connect program, patients will have the choice of having their specialty therapy mailed to them or picking it up at any of the more than 7,600 CVS/pharmacy locations, except for those in Arkansas and West Virginia due to state laws.

The initiative is “about choice and flexibility, and about simplifying and improving the member experience and...making people feel like people and not patients,” maintains Alan Lotvin, M.D., executive vice president of specialty pharmacy for CVS Caremark. When a CVS/pharmacy location receives a specialty drug prescription, it’s automatically transferred to the central specialty pharmacy, which then follows up telephonically with the patient. During that call — which is scheduled for a time convenient for the patient and is usually within 24 hours of dropping off the script — pharmacists discuss with patients the condition for which they’re being treated, as well as any additional assistance they may need, among other things. Pharmacists also ask whether patients would prefer to pick up the prescription or have it mailed to them.

In addition, pharmacists ask patients how much of the medication they still have and when they need the drug by. Lotvin says that “our commitment” is to deliver the drug by the date that patients say they need it. “If they need their drug tomorrow, we will courier it to the store,” he says. “We want to have 97% of those done within five days. Now five days sounds like a lot, and most of them take a lot less time,” but since many payers have prior-authorization requirements for specialty drugs, getting those signoffs could add a delay.

“Actual turnaround for most specialty drugs is two plus days for clean prescriptions and low prior-auth requirements,” says Bill Sullivan, principal consultant with Specialty Pharmacy Solutions LLC. “Increasingly, higher-cost drugs have more complex prior-auth processes, and that is nudging up their turnaround to three-plus days. The most complex drugs that also require genetic testing and diagnostic tests can delay an approval well past five days,” he explains. And if there is a financial assistance component, “that process can easily take days or even weeks to navigate. In short, five days is not that long. Most specialty pharmacy patients are chronic and don’t need immediate ‘life saving’ access to drugs. While there are some drugs that are ‘life critical,’ these are usually fast-tracked through the system.”

According to Lotvin, if CVS Caremark can’t fill a prescription because it’s not in a particular network, the PBM will refer the prescription to a pharmacy that can fill it, and it will still handle prior authorization and member education, as well as provide any needed supplies. That saves the prescriber from having to call around to find a pharmacy that will be able to fill the script.

At most retail pharmacies, people coming in with a prescription for a relatively high-volume specialty drug have “a 60/40 chance” of getting it then or the next day, Lotvin says. “But where you ran into trouble is you didn’t get any of the clinical support, you didn’t get any of the teaching about side effect management, any of the injection support — you basically were handed a box with needles, like, ‘Here, have at it.’” The central specialty pharmacy also is a resource for pharmacists in CVS/ pharmacy stores who may know some basic information about the drugs and conditions they treat but probably not more specific details.

The PBM, he says, “made a multimillion-dollar investment in the technology that allows us to seamlessly transfer this and keep track of the prescription” and also hired “more than a couple hundred” pharmacists for the central specialty pharmacy. “We chose to create a dedicated unit within our pharmacy that just handles these patients now, and over time we’ll disperse those folks through the rest of the specialty pharmacies from a workflow perspective and a service perspective.”

More Than Half of Patients Pick Up Drugs

The PBM piloted the program for 18 months, from fall 2012 to February 2014, and then rolled out the program to all of its CVS/pharmacy stores through the first week of May, Lotvin says. “About 54% of the patients right now are choosing to have the drug shipped back to them at the retail store.”

“From a clinical perspective, we’ve really got two or three things happening with the program,” explains Lotvin. “One is just that the core adherence goes up substantially. So if you compare people in the Specialty Connect program to traditional retail, there’s a 13% to 14% increase in the number of patients who are optimally adherent, meaning they have the right amount of drug on hand. We also find that the number of gap days, the days in between prescription fills, goes down.” And almost 100% of patients started therapy after the initial interaction at a CVS/pharmacy store. And although many people are comfortable receiving their drugs through the mail some people are most comfortable receiving their medications from a retail pharmacy, perhaps because they have a relationship with the pharmacist or because they frequent the store.”

In recent years chains have jump into specialty pharmacy big time,” such as supermarkets, says Sullivan in a **CLIENT ALERT** (SPN 3/14, p. 1). “The model has evolved. Patients clearly aren’t efficiently serviced in the retail setting. All the cognitive care and specialized services are better delivered by expert staff that doesn’t have to worry about pumping out 50+ scripts an hour behind the retail counter.”

According to Sullivan, “There is nothing different in picking up a specialty pharmacy script at the local retail pharmacy than if the script was delivered to the patient’s office. Retailers also know that these patients have other non-specialty meds that they need to pick up along with all the sale items in the Sunday flyer. I think a lot of patients enjoy it too.”

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