

Front & Center

Your Hub is Your Secret Weapon to Improve Outcomes

Many biopharma manufacturers and specialty pharmacies still think of hubs as a vehicle to provide solutions to the challenges of product access. A few hub providers have taken the hub concept farther. They see the hub as a vehicle that can provide solutions to the challenge of showing improved patients outcomes.

Every biopharma product is designed to improve outcomes, but there can be a gap between good intentions and good results. The desire to demonstrate that those products improve health outcomes has helped drive business models toward outcomes-based contracting and outcomes-based reimbursement. In fact, according to the 2015 EMD Serono Specialty Report, about a third of health plans will be using outcomes based contracts within the next two year. Programs that cannot provide it will be at a disadvantage in the marketplace. The hub can be a tool to document improved outcomes using patient engagement and real-world evidence.

The hub concept is a familiar one. The basic idea is a high-touch, comprehensive care program focused on providing product access, reimbursement, and clinical services to specific patient populations.

Paul LeVine, MS, Vice President, Analytic Services for hub provider TrialCard, sees the hub as much more. He shared a vision of the hub as an administrative process that can be adapted to improve patient engagement and collect



Paul LeVine
Vice President, Analytic Services
TrialCard, Inc.

real-world data to improve patient outcomes during Specialty Pharmacy Summit 2016.

The Hub Today

Every hub is unique, based on the unique needs of the patient population it services, the product it supports and the specific services it offers. But hubs also share common features. Typical hub services include initial verification of eligibility and benefits, ongoing reimbursement and co-pay support, patient adherence motivation and information, healthcare professional education and support services, and nursing support.

Hub Services can also be conceptualized as a patient journey from prescription to continuing positive outcomes. The journey begins with the first fill

and travels through case management and navigation services to reimbursement support, adherence and nursing services and specialty pharmacy triage and management throughout the course of treatment.

Smoothing the path to patient access can provide demonstrable benefits as LeVine showed in an analysis of one TrialCard program. The company supported a product for about 20,000 patients—some of whom used hub services while others did not. What the analysis found was that the patients using hub services averaged 4.64 prescriptions over the course of the study, while those who didn't had just 2.44 fills. Improved persistence was a clear benefit from this hub program.

Engagement Improves Outcomes

While adherence is a reasonable surrogate for outcomes in most circumstances, there are exceptions. An extreme counterexample could be a patient who is perfectly adherent but using a perfectly "ineffective" antibiotic to treat a viral infection. The central question raised by this and other adherence studies revolved around the reasons some patients are more adherence and some are less adherent. The difference may be patient engagement.

Patient engagement can be understood as the sustained participation in managing one's own health. Patients who are engaged are actively involved in the process of their own care, creating

and maintain a level of self-efficacy that allows them to do decide how best to fit care into their lives.

Self-efficacy is essentially the patient's own belief and confidence that he or she has the ability to act in ways that can affect their health and their lives. The concept of self-efficacy is widely used in behavior change. In smoking cessation programs, for example, patients with high self-efficacy are far more likely to be successful in their efforts to quit compared to similar patients with low self-efficacy.

In many ways, the hub concept is predicated on the idea of patient engagement. By removing so many of the administrative hurdles to getting the medication they need, patients can focus on the things that matter most, like understanding their condition, gaining the tools they need to manage their condition, and learning methods for enhancing their adherence. The change process begins with a new prescription, followed by learning new behaviors that help them to take the new agent as directed for the duration of the regimen.

And patient engagement isn't just an abstraction either. Researchers such as Judy Hubbard of the University of Oregon have demonstrated that patients who are more strongly "activated" (i.e., engaged) are significantly more adherent and have health care costs of 9–21% less than those who are much less engaged.

Patient engagement can be visualized—and used—as a roadmap to improve outcomes using the hub model. Engagement begins with improved access and knowledge that encourage patients the first fill, key elements in the hub model. Other elements in the hub model, case management and navigation services, reimbursement support, adherence and nursing services, and

specialty pharmacy management and triage, can be aligned to foster patient engagement in their care. Improving engagement acts to drive the "triple aim" of better outcomes, better patient care and lower costs.

Real-World Evidence and the Hub

Evidence derived from randomized clinical trials (RCTs) is the gold standard of drug development. Pharmaceutical manufacturers rely on those methods while the Food and Drug Administration and other regulatory bodies worldwide use RCTs to determine which products get and approved and which do not. Once products are approved, however, there is great need for follow-up information about how these products work in the real world. This ongoing need to learn how products work in real patients, in real clinical practice as opposed to the idealized and limited populations of clinical trials is where the interest in "real-world evidence," "patient-reported outcomes," and "patient-powered data" began. In contrast to RCTs, real-world evidence is derived from numerous alternative sources such as medical claims, clinical data, lab data, pharmacy data, and patient-powered data derived directly from real-world patient experiences.

The core administrative process of patient contact and data collection is already in place at the hub, making it the ideal infrastructure to drive patient engagement and improved outcomes. Every prescription and every patient contact becomes a trigger point, a structured opportunity to gather and apply data to understand the patient experience, to increase patient involvement, and to drive better outcomes.

An initial prescription for a new product is the first trigger. The patient gets the prescription and joins the hub program. The hub intake process can

include a pre-treatment patient survey to establish the baseline patient experience. The patient fills the prescription and then completes follow-up surveys at specific intervals. These "before and after" experiences are then structured and sent to the patient's physician. If the patient misses as step anywhere along the journey, the hub initiates the appropriate contacts to bring the patient back on track.

At the individual patient level, patient-related data can be used to provide motivational feedback and ongoing education needed to maintain engagement and adherence. At the physician level, patient-specific outcome reports can help guide treatment decisions. Practice-level reports can help providers meet the outcomes reporting increasingly required for physician reimbursement.

At the program level, outcomes data are central to outcomes-based contracting and reimbursement that health plans require. And in the aggregate, these patient-powered data can be used to provide insight into the treatment experience of patients in a wide range of conditions through abstracts, poster, and articles.

The combination of enhanced patient-level data collection and motivational feedback to the patient fundamentally transforms the familiar hub concept—whether the hub is located within the manufacturers own organization, a specialty pharmacy or a third party—from a high-touch, comprehensive care program focused on providing product access, reimbursement and clinical services to patients to one that is also *highly engaging and focused on providing better patient outcomes*.

Indeed hubs can be the secret weapon to providing customized solutions to the industry-wide challenge of improving patient outcomes.