

Pushing beyond pills

A well-executed medication therapy management program helps patients with prescription compliance, and retailers with building loyalty and generating incremental dollars.

By Michael Rubenstein

Supermarket pharmacists already know the value of treating patients with chronic conditions—their regular visits and incremental purchases help drive up margins, and when served well, these customers become extremely loyal. Those grocers operating in-store clinics have a similar opportunity to generate such loyalty, by adding medication therapy management (MTM) to their mix of services.

MTM services focus on a patient-centered, rather than product-centered, process of care. They involve the assessment and evaluation of a patient's complete medication therapy regimen, rather than focusing on an individual medication.

This relatively new service has surfaced as many patients increasingly find that relying on traditional health care providers has become less feasible as physicians acquire more and more patients.

A scenario: A woman who is obese, and also suffering from diabetes, is required to test her blood sugar (glucose levels) and insulin levels regularly throughout the day. It's unlikely that her endocrinologist or primary care physician is going to have the time to help her determine whether she's hypoglycemic on any given day or any given hour.

These traditional providers are equally as unlikely to help patients understand how medical technology in the form of glucometer devices, personal health records, O2 sensors, and so on can improve their lifestyles.

A consultative approach

MTM services can more easily allow pharmacists and convenient care clinicians to educate patients on the nature of their chronic conditions and associated medical devices. The services are independent of, but can occur in conjunction with, the provision of a medication product. And an MTM consultation between the pharmacist (or the convenient care clinician) and the patient is a billable event to the consumer, through health insurance.

The service encompasses a broad range of professional activities and responsibilities involving the licensed pharmacist, or convenient care clinician. According to the individual needs of a patient, it can include:

- Performing or obtaining necessary assessments of the patient's health status;

- Formulating a medication treatment plan;
- Selecting, initiating, modifying, or administering medication therapy;
- Monitoring and evaluating the patient's response to therapy, including safety and effectiveness;
- Performing a comprehensive medication review to identify, resolve, and prevent medication-related problems, including adverse drug events;
- Documenting the care

delivered, and communicating essential information to the patient's other primary care providers;

- Providing verbal education and training designed to enhance patient understanding and appropriate use of his or her medications;

- Providing information, support services, and resources designed to enhance patient adherence with his or her therapeutic regimens;

- Coordinating and integrating medication therapy management services within the broader health care management services being provided to the patient.

Chances are that your pharmacist or convenient care clinician is doing some, or many, of these services already, but isn't collecting money in return. Health insurance companies are happy to pay for these programs, because they meet with their requirements for health, wellness, and prevention initiatives.

Be aware, however, that to incorporate MTM seamlessly as part of your overall health-and-wellness growth plan, you must have a pharmacist/convenient care clinician who is willing to embrace it and the technology required to support it. You must have the technology infrastructure to support an MTM program, and to be able to bill for it. Because MTM is a fairly new value-added offering, many pharmacists currently aren't set up to bill either the patient or the payer (insurance provider) properly.

Once you do what's necessary to set up such a program, however, you'll be delivering a new service that reinforces your message as a provider for every consumer health need.

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Grocery list

MTM was approved in July 2004. The criteria for its use were created by the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy, the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, the American College of Apothecaries, the American College of Clinical Pharmacy, the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists, the American Pharmacists Association, the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy, the National Association of Chain Drug Stores, the National Community Pharmacists Association, and the National Council of State Pharmacy Association Executives.

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