Clinical Educators: Positive Impact on Patient Experiences

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Introduction

As pharmaceutical and device manufacturers search for ways to improve the patient’s experience with medical treatment and be a conduit to guide patients through insurance, one key role emerges as a direct link between the company and the patient—clinical educators.

Clinical educators play the most versatile role in today’s healthcare industry. Like the hub of a wheel, clinical educators are at the center of a patient’s success with therapy, helping to navigate nearly every spoke of the system. The healthcare system is complex, and patients may feel overwhelmed as they try to comprehend healthcare pricing and insurance coverage on top of managing a disease, new treatment and perhaps even new care providers. Clinical educators can help support and guide patients through insurance coverage counseling, treatment education, location support, transition of care assistance, injection training and support, and integration of treatment into the patient’s lifestyle. Moreover, they can often provide these services remotely or even in the patient’s home.

Clinical educators can help empower the patient to make their own informed healthcare choices. Patients want to take a more active role in their own treatment, but the range of patient awareness and familiarity with medications is broad. Many patients may research medications on the Internet or see advertisements for drugs on television and come prepared with questions for the doctor. Others listen to their physician during an office visit, but quickly forget what the doctor has told them about their treatment. Clinical educators can offer continued education and training about a prescribed therapy long after the patient has left the doctor’s office, and in this intermediary role they are the perfect resource to help patients with important lifestyle management goals.

Furthermore, clinical educators can interact with a patient in their home, providing education and training in a patient’s most comfortable setting. Clinical educators can also engage with patients in community settings, over the phone or via video chat. Few physicians ever have this type of interaction with a patient. Some programs offer continued virtual connections between clinical educators and patients to promote adherence to a treatment regimen.

In this role, clinical educators can be the key to keeping a patient compliant with a prescribed medication and treatment regimen. The connections they maintain with the patient help to identify challenges the patient may face while integrating a new treatment into their lifestyle. Utilizing a clinical educator support team can be an innovative way to help support a product while improving the patient’s experience with a drug or device.

The case studies described in this paper demonstrate how clinical educator teams have successfully helped companies improve both patient adherence rates and patient satisfaction levels.

Clinical Educators Are So Versatile

Clinical Educators can play so many roles in the healthcare system. Here are just a few of the ways they can improve understanding and patient confidence.

- Telehealth follow-up
- Discussion about side effect management, if within product label
- In-home training
- Patient advocacy
- Peer-to-peer communication
- Both patient- and physician-facing
- Virtual training
- Disease state awareness for patients and caregivers
- Patient transitions
Adherence Issues: Care Transitions

A pharmaceutical company can strategically engage a clinical educator support team to improve patient adherence rates by identifying hurdles that the patient may face with new treatments and then helping to resolve the challenges. Because their focus is on assisting the patient, the clinical educator deployed by a drug or device manufacturer represents a real resource for the patient and can even help to improve brand perception or lead to brand loyalty.

One way in which clinical educators have demonstrated an impact on drug adherence is by helping to reduce therapy discontinuation rates caused by transitions of care, which occur when a patient moves or is moved between healthcare locations, providers or levels of care, for example, from a hospital setting to the home setting.

During these transitions, adherence rates can decline for many reasons. Some patients simply forget or don’t understand their doctor’s instructions; others are put off by a lack of immediate response to their medication or by unpleasant side effects.

In this example, clinical educators were critical in helping a brand overcome adherence challenges related to such transitions of care.

Case Study: Innovative Solution Redesign Accelerates Growth of Launch Brand

The performance of a cardiovascular brand in its first 18 months postlaunch was significantly below expectations due to a high therapy discontinuation rate. Syneos Health analytics revealed that discontinuation was occurring at the hospital following discharge.

Syneos Health built the brand’s first nurse educator team. The team, comprised of nearly 200 transition-of-care nurse specialists, focused on hospital discharge, where patients typically begin therapy. The nurse field teams collaborated with the brand’s existing teams in the HCP office, institutions and managed markets.

On average, the brand saw a 40 percent improvement from prescription to first fill for patients from participating institutions. The program was renewed the following year, expanding the team by 20 percent.
Adherence Issues: Complicated Dosing

Complicated dosing regimens can leave patients feeling intimidated and unmotivated. The learning curve may be high, the delivery device could be complicated, the dosing protocol may be very time-consuming, or there may be logistical challenges, such as travel to an infusion center. This case study examines how a nurse educator support team used education and training to overcome therapy discontinuation challenges.

Case Study: Nurse Team Created to Address Care Coordination and Therapy Adherence

During the launch of a new indication of a biologic therapy (a therapy class notorious for high discontinuation rates), a complicated dosing protocol led to a need for additional patient support.

Syneos Health built the client’s first nurse support program, designed to help patients navigate the complexities of coverage, medication coordination and self-injection training. The nurse support team was responsible for supporting patients at critical times in the treatment journey and facilitated communications with healthcare practitioner offices.

Not only did the project create a one-of-a-kind support program for the client, but it also delivered critical insights into patient demographics, patient behaviors and business analytics. The program was well-received by patients. Seventy-five percent of all injection trainings were completed live by a nurse educator or injection training specialist, instead of via telephone support, surpassing the program’s initial goal of 50 percent.

Within nine months of initiating the program, enrollment in the nurse support program grew from 17 percent of all patients prescribed therapy to 25 percent. As a result of the program, patients were more likely to stay adherent to their medication longer.
Patient Preference

Not only can a clinical educator team help boost adherence rates when it comes to transition hurdles and complicated dosing issues, but it’s what patients want. Patients overwhelmingly prefer face-to-face interaction. Doctors may not be able to spend enough time with patients to talk through all of their concerns. Clinicians, including nurses, are the resources that patients actually want to access.

Case Study: Patient Training Success

One Syneos Health clinical educator team trained patients to utilize an injectable medication in a convenient location. Syneos Health data and analytics revealed that people overwhelmingly preferred face-to-face interactions for training and education. A survey of patients serviced by the clinical educator team found that 54 percent of patients identified live training sessions with the clinical educators as the most helpful resource, more than the other four response options—opportunity to practice with a demo pen, take-home support materials, training at their doctor’s office and information about the disease and treatment reviewed—combined.

Most impressively, with more than 1,000 patients responding to the survey, patient confidence levels for how to use the prescribed therapy rose from 42 percent pre-session with a clinical educator to 94 percent post-session.*

*Patients were asked at the end of each training session to describe confidence levels before and after education. Results are compiled from survey responses collected between March 2015 and September 2016.

Case Study: Home Injection Training

In some cases, clinical educators offer in-home training, which patients widely favor. In this example, a client’s former vendor had previously offered only office-based injection training for a self-injectable human growth hormone. Syneos Health created a nurse educator program that offered options for self-injection training. When given the choice of in-office training or in-home training, nearly 100 percent of patients and caregivers opted for in-home training. (The remaining 2 percent were not given the option of in-home training by their physician’s office.)

Moreover, the on-call specialist team consistently exceeded satisfaction levels in patient surveys. Monthly training requests averaged 108 with a patient satisfaction survey of 4.9 out of 5.0.
Considerations and Best Practices for Establishing a Clinical Educator Support Team

When establishing a clinical educator support team, a pharmaceutical or device maker will want to consider a variety of capabilities, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Ability to provide education, patient advocacy and patient training with the objective of keeping the patient adherent to therapy
- Clinicians experienced in a broad range of therapeutic categories, including biologics and orphan medications
- Capability to provide services in all 50 states with a consistently high response rate
- A team with a broad range of credentials to meet the various educational needs of patients
- Telehealth capabilities, including call centers with trained and credentialed clinicians with clinical experience that includes knowledge of patient management

A successful team will have a clearly defined role for the clinical educator, including the clinical educator team's goals and limitations, and lay out how they can and should coordinate with other stakeholders. Since clinical educators can interact with both sales teams and clinical teams, a pharmaceutical or device manufacturer should align those goals with a focus on patient compliance and compliance with healthcare regulations.

Investment in a clinical educator team can provide a seamless customer experience with a single point of contact for the patient, doctor and office. These teams can coordinate client resources to provide training for physicians, staff and patients, preventing inefficiencies and helping patients stay compliant with the treatments prescribed by their physicians. In their unique role, clinical educators may be the critical factor in creating the optimal balance between improved brand perception and patient centricity.

Clinical Educator Team Composition

Clinical Educator Teams can include many different models. Here are just a few of the professionals who may comprise a clinical educator team.

- Clinical Nurse Educator
- Clinical Nurse Specialist
- Nurse Navigator
- Diabetes Educator
- Clinical Trial Liaison
- Patient Service Liaison
- Field Case Managers
- Community Medical Liaisons

These services are intended to ensure and provide education for patients/health care providers. These offerings are in no way intended, nor should they be considered a means to induce/influence prescription utilization by healthcare prescribers.
Syneos Health Nurse Advisory Board

Syneos Health periodically hosts advisory board meetings with industry experts, including heads of hospitals and hospital departments, infection control experts, pharmaceutical companies, nursing schools and nurses who are attorneys, and experts in health care compliance. These meetings help Syneos Health stay current with state-of-the-art practices and guidelines to provide the best solutions for their customers.

About Syneos Health Therapeutic Strategic Solutions

Clinical educator teams are deployed through the Syneos Health Therapeutic Strategic Solutions, a division of Syneos Health within Commercial Solutions. Clinical educator teams at Syneos Health provide training and education on disease state, products, new treatment paradigms, new delivery systems or other important healthcare information. Clinical educators provide support live in the field, in patient homes or virtually throughout our digital platform. Each program is built and customized around customer and patient needs following healthcare and compliance guidelines. Every Syneos Health clinical educator is trained to understand and comply with these guidelines.

The goal of our Syneos Health clinical educator teams is improving patient outcomes through education.

About Syneos Health

Syneos Health™ (Nasdaq:SYNH) is the only fully integrated biopharmaceutical solutions organization. Our company, including a Contract Research Organization (CRO) and Contract Commercial Organization (CCO), is purpose-built to accelerate customer performance to address modern market realities. Created through the merger of two industry leading companies – INC Research and inVentiv Health – we bring together more than 23,000 clinical and commercial minds with the ability to support customers in more than 110 countries. Together we share insights, use the latest technologies and apply advanced business practices to speed our customers’ delivery of important therapies to patients.

To learn more about how we are shortening the distance from lab to life® visit syneoshealth.com.

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