

# Reducing the High Cost of Patient Non-Adherence:

## *Navigating the Optimal Journey to Improved Outcomes*

By Amy Parke, *Vice President Integrated Marketing Communications, Ashfield Healthcare Communications*

The statistics are truly staggering. Healthcare delivery costs are skyrocketing with no end in sight. Billions are at stake in a segment that is predicted to represent almost a fifth of the United States' Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2023 according to economists at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.<sup>1</sup> Compound this problem with the fact that the spend on chronic diseases, representing 80% of the current total, continues to increase as each day goes by.<sup>2</sup> And yet according to PhRMA, of the 145 million Americans suffering from chronic diseases, only one-third are taking their medications as prescribed.<sup>3</sup>

Non-adherence is a well recognized problem, as a recent study of Medicare and Medicaid patients demonstrated, citing that as many as "two out of three medication-related U.S. hospital admissions and 125,000 deaths a year" are a result of non-adherence. 40% of nursing home admissions are also attributed to non-adherence.<sup>5</sup> The same study cited that "one in five new prescriptions go unfilled" and "two-thirds of patients do not adhere to prescription medications."<sup>6</sup>

Yet, it is a well established fact that successfully managing these diseases could dramatically improve healthcare costs and patient outcome. IMS Institute for Healthcare Informatics reported in a 2013 study that the U.S. could save \$213 billion annually if medicines were used properly, with the largest portion of this saving resulting from proper patient adherence to the prescribed treatment protocol. That's \$105 billion in annual savings just on treating those with the chronic conditions of high cholesterol, diabetes, hypertension, osteoporosis, HIV,

and congestive heart failure.<sup>3</sup> Now consider the rise in prescriptions for costly specialized medicines and biologics, many with a significant learning curve on treatment procedures, and the next step is clear.

**Improving patient adherence is not only critical to reducing overall healthcare costs and improving the pharmaceutical industry's revenues, but also in promoting better patient outcomes on which the healthcare industry is being judged.**

So what can the pharmaceutical industry do to stop this vicious cycle of non-adherence? It all starts with the patient journey.

PATIENT ADHERENCE WHITE PAPER

**THE PATIENT JOURNEY TO IMPROVED OUTCOMES**

Reaching today's patient is not an easy task. One must first obtain position on the formulary serving the patient's geographic location. Medications need to be affordable or otherwise subsidized in order to overcome any financial concerns the patient might have in following the prescribed treatment. The market access teams representing a brand entering a crowded marketplace for chronic disease, must be armed with clinical data that clearly demonstrates the brand's safety and efficacy along with its inherent healthcare benefits. The case then becomes one of simple economics: the proposed brand's suggested price versus others in its field. A good market access rep knows this inside and out. In the case of higher-priced specialty medications, pharmaco-economics might be necessary to make the case, and once accepted, the life sciences company may need to address rebates, off-invoice discounts and other promotional methodologies to make the medication affordable.

Once the formulary position has been established, patients and physicians need to be educated to the brand's effectiveness in treating the disease and how to obtain the medication affordably. Certainly today's patients are becoming more and more savvy on exploring healthcare options with each passing generation. They read, blog, text and tweet – all absorbing content on the go from a variety of media. Physicians also work in a fast-paced environment where they often exceed their patients in the use of technology to obtain information. Meeting the needs of both via the appropriate media channels and with information of value is an important step in starting a meaningful engagement.

**Moving towards a holistic interactive approach between all parties will therefore lead to more successful, engaging conversations between all parties, and hopefully, improved patient outcome.**

On the patient side, one should examine both the physical and emotional issues within the patient journey. Certainly emotions play a strong role not only in a patient's decision to start a medication but also in continuing to take it throughout the course of the disease. By abandoning past methodologies and gathering insights on both the emotional and physical impacts of disease, there is much greater likelihood of developing conversations of value to everyone. Working with these insights will go a long way in eliminating today's disconnects in satisfying the patient's unmet needs, as well as forming a more meaningful basis for the brand's marketing strategy.

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Developing the right content is only the first step, however. Engaging with the patient is even more critical when one considers the many reasons patients currently cite for non-adherence. According to a survey conducted for Prescriptions for a Healthy America, 23% of respondents do not take their meds because they simply forget; 19% forget to take them when they leave the house or travel; 17% find it inconvenient or difficult to take as prescribed; 11% stop when they think their chronic condition is under control...and the list goes on.<sup>7</sup>

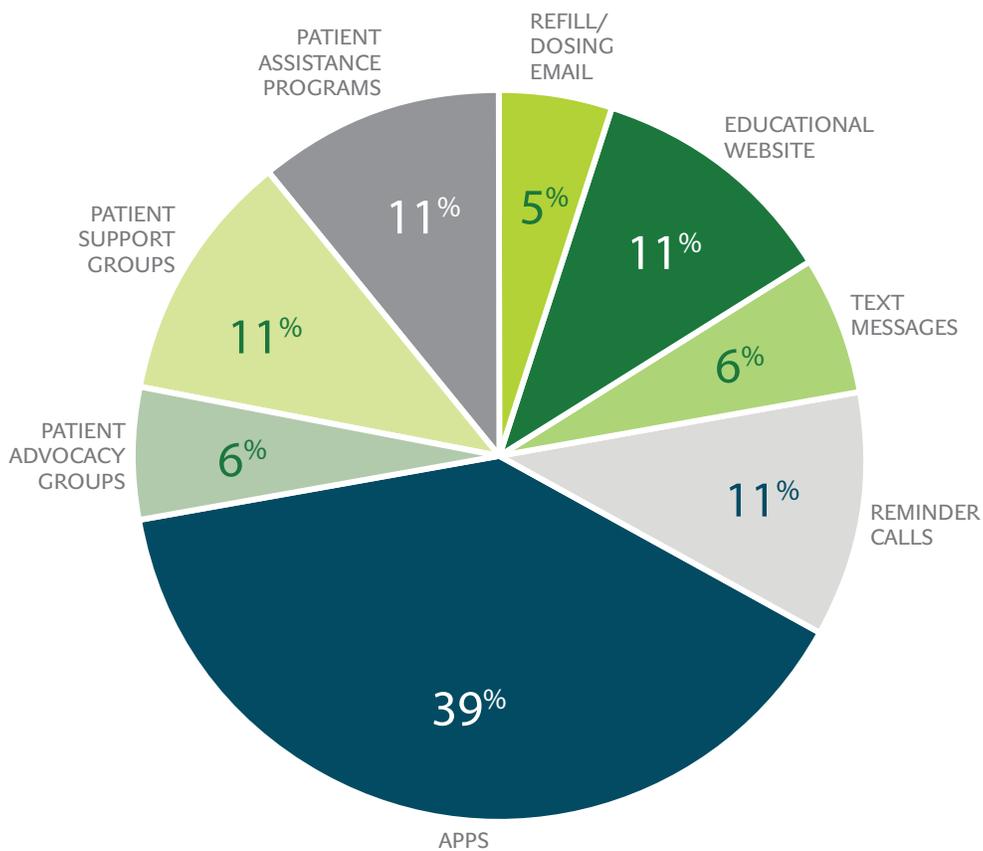
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Reaching these patients and helping them successfully start and maintain their medication is not impossible if a plan is developed to provide the patient with the materials and support needed. Over the course of the next five years it would appear that patients will draw upon a wide variety of media to find information on their condition and its possible treatment according to information published by Cutting Edge Information based on surveys and interviews of pharmaceutical marketers. (Figure 1) Working outside today's industry comfort zone of consumer advertising, brochures, some educational websites and social media will become necessary to reach patients and help them adhere to their treatment regimens to achieve the most optimum journey with their disease.

In working with physicians, reaching them and educating them to the patient journey content shared with those interested in the disease, prior to seeing patients and/or their caregivers is key, as physicians must be aware of what is known about the disease and the brand in order to prescribe the best treatment. Working in feedback on actual patient performance with the medication will aid the physician in keeping the patient engaged with the course of treatment.

In addition, the pharmaceutical company needs to work with the physician's staff to educate them on how they can interact both with the pharmaceutical company and specialty pharmacies to assist patients in obtaining high-priced medications that are beyond their ability to pay.

**Figure 1:**  
**PATIENT OUTREACH ACTIVITIES MOST LIKELY TO INCREASE IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS**



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### CREATING THE OPTIMAL PATIENT JOURNEY: A CASE STUDY

Using the resources within our Healthcare Communications, Commercial and Clinical companies, Ashfield has helped clients build successful approaches to adherence throughout the patient journey. Focus is on collaboration between patient and caregiver, taking a holistic view towards communication between all touch points.

The following case study demonstrates the adherence support plan put in place for a pharmaceutical company with an injectable biologic for an immune system disorder. Our objective was to create a patient advocate program that would address all the concerns a potential patient might have regarding obtaining, using and maintaining their medication. The Patient Advocate program we put in place created outreach for the patient, healthcare professional and pharmaceutical company sales reps.

**For the patient, our goals were to:**

- Provide education on the disease state and the biologic (Brand X) with a focus on successfully starting and staying on the injectable
- Coach and train on the Injectable
- Answer and appropriately triage cost and reimbursement concerns to the appropriate support resources at the pharmaceutical company
- Provide in-home/virtual injection trainings, adherence visits, and follow up phone calls as required

**For the healthcare professional (HCP), our goals were to:**

- Work with the client to assess HCP and office needs
- Provide feedback on patient successes and challenges with starting and staying on Brand X – for each patient
- Provide education on the Brand X’s Patient Advocate Program and related reimbursement services
- Provide disease state and Brand X specific education to HCP and office staff

To assist our client, we partnered with sales reps at the territory level to support patients successfully starting and staying on Brand X.

**Figure 2:  
PROVIDING PATIENT SUPPORT FOR ACCESS, ADHERENCE AND RETENTION**



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The program utilized a call center staffed with nurses and trained customer support representatives and field nurses to reinforce the patient throughout their touch points with Brand X. It was determined that the most likely candidates to successfully benefit from the patient advocate program would be:

- A newly diagnosed patient
- Those suffering with needle phobia or fatigue
- Those who recently had a change in caregiver
- Those with injection site reactions
- Those identified with a declining adherence risk assessment score
- Those experiencing a decline in their condition
- Those who were converting to an auto-injectable device for Brand X

**The overall response to the program was overwhelmingly positive. Of the 2,375 patients surveyed to-date, 93% reported satisfaction with their nursing support, and 90% said they would recommend the brand**

Prospective patients for the program were contacted via the call center where they were initially assessed via a thirteen point questionnaire as to their current medical status, the nature of the biologic formula they would be using, their comfort level with an injectable, and how and when they would like training. They were given the option to have a nurse visit them at their home or through a virtual meeting via the Internet to provide live injection training, education and triage to the specialty pharmacy support representative who would provide assistance in obtaining their prescription. Throughout the contact period, additional support was provided via the call center, email and direct mail to aid adherence and retention to the brand.

In addition, sales reps were provided with educational material on the program to present to HCPs as the program was set to begin within each practice. Reps then followed up with data on individual patient performance once a patient was enrolled in the program. This closed the information loop, allowing the HCP to

review progress with the patient at the next visit based on actual performance, thereby creating a more engaging interaction.

On the back end, a portal was established to support the nurses and territory reps. This portal was designed to support the scheduling of appointments with the nurse and demonstrate patient performance which could be shared with the physician via a feedback report. It incorporated protected patient data that could be viewed in “real time” via dashboards to manage the program performance and generate reports on status.

The overall response to the program was overwhelmingly positive. Of the 2,375 patients surveyed to-date, 93% reported satisfaction with their nursing support, and 90% said they would recommend the brand based on the overall support they received from both the nurses and specialty pharmacy.

### OPTIMIZING COSTS FOR IMPROVED OUTCOMES

With the pharmaceutical industry facing increasing costs in drug development and more specialized opportunities for treatment, it is in everyone’s best interests to identify the right patients and maintain those patients on the proper medication throughout their journey with the disease. Improving patient outcomes will not only solidify the brand’s position on formularies, providing patient access, but will go a long way to reducing the ever-burgeoning healthcare costs.



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### NOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> "Health care spending expected to pick up, grab bigger share of GDP," By Tom Howell Jr. - The Washington Times - Wednesday, September 3, 2014 as seen in <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/sep/3/health-care-spending-expected-spike-coming-years/>
- <sup>2</sup> "Bending the Healthcare Cost Curve through Better Medication Adherence for People Suffering from Chronic Disease, [www.DemocraticGovernors.org](http://www.DemocraticGovernors.org), pg. 4.
- <sup>3</sup> "Solving the Medication Adherence Challenge: Prescriptions for a Healthy America," | By John Castellani, As posted 05.02.13 at: <http://www.phrma.org/solving-medication-adherence-challenge>
- <sup>4</sup> "Bending the Healthcare Cost Curve through Better Medication Adherence for People Suffering from Chronic Disease, [www.DemocraticGovernors.org](http://www.DemocraticGovernors.org), pg. 8.
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/sites/johnlechteiter/2013/07/21/medicine-is-most-expensive-when-its-not-taken-at-all/>
- <sup>6</sup> "Bending the Healthcare Cost Curve through Better Medication Adherence for People Suffering from Chronic Disease, [www.DemocraticGovernors.org](http://www.DemocraticGovernors.org), pg. 8.
- <sup>7</sup> Survey conducted for Prescriptions for a Healthy America by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, May, 2013; Available at [adhereforhealth.org](http://adhereforhealth.org). Accessed March 21, 2014.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Amy Parke holds the VP Integrated Marketing Communications role at Ashfield Healthcare Communications. She is dedicated to collaborating with clients to develop multichannel strategies and tactics that will successfully achieve their objectives. Amy brings 15 years of diverse experience in healthcare communications. The majority of her career has been spent working in patient education with a focus in oncology. With her vast amount of patient experience she leads the team as a group advocate for changing the conversation between pharma, HCPs and patients.

### ASHFIELD HEALTHCARE COMMUNICATIONS

This Ashfield area of expertise serves global clients by connecting insight, intelligence and proficiency to deliver powerful multichannel communication solutions. Drawing from a staff of more than 750 talented and driven professionals – across multiple disciplines and geographies – Ashfield Healthcare Communications creates the best team for every assignment and partnership. In addition to our multichannel communication solutions we provide disease-state education, delivered via congress, digital and web initiatives, across major therapy areas and multisponsor independent initiatives.

### ABOUT ASHFIELD COMMERCIAL & MEDICAL SERVICES:

Ashfield Commercial and Medical Services is a global leader in the provision of contract sales outsourcing services to pharmaceutical manufacturers with operations in major markets including continental Europe, the UK, North America and a presence in South America and Asia. The division provides sales teams, telesales, nurse educators, medical information, healthcare communications and event management services to healthcare companies in 22 countries. It focuses on supporting healthcare professionals and patients at all stages of the product life cycle.

We're part of UDG Healthcare plc. With over 8,000 people in 22 countries, UDG Healthcare provides innovative, outsourced services that deliver outstanding results and enable healthcare companies to bring their products quickly to market. By combining our areas of expertise with the right people, infrastructure and capability, Ashfield is offering an outsourcing partnership that accelerates results like no other.

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