

# Front & Center

## Enhancing Patient Engagement in Cancer Treatment

As cancer patients play a growing role in their treatment, the healthcare industry can help guide patient involvement by using multiple channels of communication and offering complementary custom content tailored to individual needs and interests.

**O**n October 17, 2012, Pharmaceutical Executive and McKesson Specialty Health presented a live webcast that focused on the increasing involvement of cancer patients in their own healthcare.

Changes in technology, easier access to information and greater financial participation are only a few of the reasons patients are becoming more involved in their own healthcare. The trend toward greater patient involvement is especially evident in cancer care. My Care Plus, a patient portal created by McKesson Specialty Health especially for patients with a diagnosis of cancer, has attracted 15,000 users in only a few months and expects 50,000 regular users by March 2013.

“Fifty thousand cancer patients is a significant patient population,” said Dan Lodder, Vice President of Technology Sales, Services and Portals for McKesson Specialty Health. “This is a snowball that is picking up speed. It is a significant opportunity for pharma

to engage these patients in ways that have never been possible before.”

It’s not an accident that patients are becoming more involved in their own care. In addition to several societal trends, a variety of federal programs



Dan Lodder

are also driving patient involvement. More options are also available to them, which require patients to know more than ever before about their own health, their cancer and treatment possibilities.

Targeted therapies are becoming the norm in cancer treatment, and it is projected that over one third of the market will be oral therapies by 2014. As treatment is moving from the infusion room to the living room, the growing reliance on oral medication places most of the responsibility on patients and caregivers to remain compliant.

For patients, the question is not whether they will get more involved in treatment decisions, but how. Patients need information on their particular type of cancer, treatment options, ad-

herence and compliance, management of side effects, reimbursement and funding options, as well as support from other patients.

### Multiple Channels

The message for pharma and other information providers is that cancer patients and caregivers use multiple information sources.

Cancer patients tend to be older, and older demographics often prefer print to on-line vehicles. However, the trend is clear and online is rapidly gaining popularity across all demographics. Of adults 65 and older, 53% are Internet users. Internet use jumps to 77% for adults aged 50 to 64. Lodder noted that 10,000 Americans reach 65 every day. Those frequent Internet users will continue their online habits, but they will also continue to read and talk with their healthcare providers. Additionally, despite their older median age, cancer patients as a group are twice as likely to share health information online than the average consumer. “You need to have the multi-faceted approach and engagement,” Lodder said. If a strategy focuses on only one type of vehicle, say only print or only online, you will miss the boat.

“Two-thirds of cancer patients are going online for information,” Lodder said. “They trust that information. They are going to places like WebMD and Mayo and trusting what they find. What we can help cancer patients do is find more directly relevant information, specific to their needs. More and more cancer patients need and want to be seriously engaged with their health. That is why we have seen a significant early adoption of My Care Plus.”

For cancer patients, cancer-specific portals such as curetoday.com and My Care Plus have a tremendous advantage over general health portals. Patients who use cancer-specific portals do not have to sift through general health information in order to find the cancer topics they are looking for. They can focus on the cancer topics that have become central to their entire life.

### Providers Accessible Online

The Internet offers broad benefits to cancer patients, noted Lodder. Information is current and wide ranging, from the most general to the latest clinical trial results. Information and teaching formats exist to suit almost every type of learner in almost any written language. And the Internet is available 24/7.

Patients also expect their providers to be digitally savvy. Surveys show that a solid majority of patients, 77%, want to ask questions of their physician without an appointment. Almost as many, 75%, want to be able to interact with their physician online and want email access to their physician. And 62% of patients say that access to electronic services would influence their choice of physician.

The federal government is pushing physicians online as well. Four policy programs—value-based purchasing,

meaningful use, avoidable readmissions and accountable care organizations—all include incentives and/or penalties that are designed to drive patient engagement. Not all of these programs explicitly require technology solutions, said Lodder, but increased use of information technology and electronic patient communication is the only practical way to meet the requirements.

The federal push for HIT, health-care information technology, has helped to fuel the emergence of patient portals. A patient portal is a detailed patient health information service, often devoted to a specific disease, that is an extension of a practice. My Care Plus is an extension of the practices from The US Oncology Network and is linked to iKnowMed, the most widely used health system electronic health record (EHR) in office-based oncology, used by about 1,300 physicians.

“Patients really want access to this kind of targeted information,” said Lodder. “We have been a little surprised at just how quickly this demographic has responded. Patients are coming back and back and back. It shows how hungry patients are for information today.”

One reason for the surprise is that My Care Plus has limited functionality as of now. It provides highly targeted clinical information based on the individual patient’s EHR. Although this will be added in the near future, it does not yet provide appointments, bill pay or other self-service items typically provided by a patient portal. Personalized information is enough to attract patients and drive repeat usage.

“You no longer have to sift through breast and colorectal cancer information and services if you have lung cancer,” said Lodder. “This can be a powerful tool from the perspectives of

practice and patient efficiency and patient satisfaction.”

### A New Pharma Channel

Faster than expected patient uptake is good news for providers, practices and pharma, he continued. “By the end of March next year, we expect 50,000 regular users and by ASCO, even more.” For providers and practices, the portal helps meet the electronic patient communication requirements of Meaningful Use. For patients, it provides a vehicle to get information specific to their needs, and with the added functionalities planned for the near future, a convenient communication medium with their provider.

Because the portal is linked to each user’s EHR, it is possible and practical for pharma to target patient messaging based on clinical events, drug exposure, adverse event reports and other individualized factors.

It can also be just as powerful as a vehicle for surveys, post-marketing studies, patient assistance programs and other instruments. “The portal is a tool for anything where we want information from the patient perspective,” said Lodder. “There is a lot that we can do from the perspective of patient and provider functionality, but also from the pharma perspective. Now, you can engage the patient, in a HIPAA-compliant way, and get specific information back or send very targeted information. You can target almost any specific patient population based on the EHR and glean data that just don’t exist today.” &

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For a more detailed discussion of this topic, a complete on-demand version of the original fifty-five minute webcast is available online at [www.pharmexec.com/growing](http://www.pharmexec.com/growing).