

KEEP THEM COMING BACK FOR MORE

Awareness advertising has given way to targeted patient-education and patient-compliance initiatives, opening up a new avenue for improving sales. BY STEVE NILES

Money spent to research and market a product is wasted if the patient decides not to take the drug. By educating patients on the importance of complying with their prescriptions, pharmaceutical companies can improve their reputations and boost the bottom line. There are many reasons why patients do not adhere to a prescribed drug regimen. Increasingly, pharmaceutical companies are developing patient-education initiatives designed to address those issues. Although a variety of media channels are used to reach patients, the Internet has become most important.

In the past, a pharmaceutical company's equation for success involved adding sales representatives, raising prices, and launching direct-to-consumer marketing. The equation has changed. Pipelines for most pharmaceutical companies are not as strong as they were five years ago, companies are finding diminishing returns in adding to their sales forces, price increases are under more scrutiny, and direct-to-consumer advertising is showing questionable return-on-investment.

Educational programs are becoming one of the first choices of marketing tools because of their cost effectiveness. "What we're seeing now is that most brand managers are trying to do more with less," says Kerr Holbrook, VP, marketing, **McKesson Specialty** (mckessonsspecialty.com). "By that I mean trying to recognize the full lifetime value of the patient, and they do that through these educational adherence-type programs."

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Patient-education programs are necessary because most patients forget most of what their doctor tells them less than six minutes after walking out the door, according to the patient-education company **HealthEd**. About 33% of adults frequently fail to follow the treatment regimens for medications they were prescribed. About 50% of all patients do not take medications as directed, resulting in billions of dollars in lost revenue. Patients need more comprehensible education materials. According to HealthEd, about 90 million adults read at or below the eighth-grade level.

The good news is, pharmaceutical companies are getting better at offering effective compliance programs, according to Elizabeth Boehm, senior analyst, **Forrester Research Inc.** (forrester.com). The pharmaceutical industry is moving away from the awareness-driven focus that relied on television DTC advertising, to embracing the idea of compliance/adherence/persistence and targeting a much smaller audience. "Compliance/adherence/persistence programs have been around for a long time, but there hasn't been a solid platform ... to deliver it on a broad scale inexpensively," she says.

The use of the Internet is allowing companies to target their audiences, according to Eve M. Stern, senior VP, business development and marketing, **NexCura Inc.** (nexcure.com), a health-care information and communications company. These Internet-based, patient-centered education programs arm consumers with evidence-based information and tools they need to make informed choices about their treatment options and side effects. The result is greater compliance and a higher level of patient satisfaction. Adherence programs that are supported by an ongoing relationship with patients are more successful than one-time or even periodic outreach messages.

"The message of such campaigns must be relevant, appropriate, and targeted to patient needs on the continuum of the disease course," Ms. Stern says. "The patient-education information needs to be tailored to the patient's information needs at each critical decision point as the patient navigates through his or her treatment regimen."

To create a successful adherence program, Ms. Stern recommends that companies first mount an evidence-based educational e-mail campaign to a targeted, permission-based patient database of registered users. This process builds a trusted relationship.

"Follow that with an invitation to order educational materials, and patients will appreciate and value the information and act on messages that support compliance and follow-up care," Ms. Stern says.

Patients want personalized, individual attention and education, according to Georgianna Donadio, Ph.D., founder and director of the **National Institute of Whole Health** (wholehealtheducation.com). "We must return to relationship-centered medicine and treat our patients the way we would want to be treated if we suddenly found ourselves in a disease or pathology state," Dr. Donadio says.

The National Institute of Whole Health educates medical professionals and works with insurance and pharmaceutical companies to put Whole Health educators into health and medical practices so that they may educate patients about their health and empower them to change behavior to meet compliance, improve outcomes, and reduce costs.

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Ms. Stern believes that some pharmaceutical companies are making great strides in the area of patient education, but the industry can do far more. Many pharmaceutical companies continue to invest in physician-education and awareness programs and underinvest in targeted consumer-education strategies.

“It is ironic that at a time that pharmaceutical companies are investing in and developing ever more targeted therapies, they seem to be allocating more dollars to broadcast, ‘systemic’ marketing strategies,” Ms. Stern says. “With the continued growth in the consumer movement and consumer-driven health plans forcing patients to become more accountable health-care purchasers, pharma companies would be wise to bolster their patient-education programs to targeted patients in concert with the programs they are doing for health-care providers.”

Good for the bottom line

Consumer Health Information Corp. estimates that 30% to 85% of patients disregard refills and that 10% to 20% of initial prescriptions go unfilled. This means drug brands are losing out on millions of dollars in revenue.

“If the pharmaceutical company does not provide the patient with the information they need, that pharmaceutical company is never going to reap the benefits of long-term sales for chronic disease medications,” says Dorothy L. Smith, president and CEO of Consumer Health Information (consumer-health.com).

Patient-education programs increase sales by emphasizing the importance of compliance with a complete course of treatment, which includes taking correct dosages at the right intervals for the optimal period of time. Patients are more apt to go back for refills, complete their full prescriptions, and even just fill their prescriptions in the first place when they understand the implications of noncompliance, according to Eric Bolesh, research team leader, **Cutting Edge Information** (cuttingedgeinfo.com).

“Sales increase with earlier patient participation in the identification of treatment options, adverse effects, and patient-initiated conversations about alternative treatment options and compliance with treatment guidelines,” Ms. Stern says. The ultimate benefit is to the bottom line for product brand teams.

According to Dr. Donadio, in the U.S. statin market alone, one year of noncompliance costs pharmaceutical companies al-

most \$3.9 billion in revenue. As little as a 5% increase in compliance rates can translate to \$30 million to \$40 million in revenue. “It makes good and profitable business sense to provide support and endowments to health-education organizations who produce models of patient-health education that are proven to affect the compliance statistics, even marginally, as this results in significant revenue increase for the drug companies,” Dr. Donadio says.