Benefit design impacts specialty care

Study finds one in six cancer patients with high out-of-pocket costs do not fill prescription

**BACKGROUND:** While specialty drugs are most often injected or infused, cancer drugs taken orally are an exception to this rule. Oral oncology drugs are very expensive and often require complex care. For these specialty drugs, non-adherence can be life-threatening.

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**Oral oncology is fastest growing specialty category**

Oral oncology drug spend increased 18.9 percent in 2010 across Prime Therapeutics’ (Prime’s) book of business, making it the fastest growing specialty drug category. With these rapidly rising costs, plan sponsors are looking for opportunities to best manage spending. This sometimes results in shifting more of the cost burden to the member.

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**OOP costs affect drug abandonment**

A study from Prime found one in six cancer patients with high OOP costs abandon their medication at the pharmacy. Patients with an OOP cost greater than $200 were at least three times more likely to not fill their prescription than those with OOP costs of $100 or less.

The results demonstrate that benefit design can have a powerful effect on prescription abandonment rates. Prime recommends a member share maximum for specialty drugs to help prevent prescription abandonment.

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**Oral cancer therapy prescription abandonment rate**

![Oral cancer therapy prescription abandonment rate chart](chart.png)
Smart pharmacy management helps prevent abandonment, reduce waste

Saving pharmacy dollars at the expense of greater medical costs is not an effective cost management strategy. This is why Prime recommends setting a maximum member cost share of $100 for preferred specialty drugs, to prevent prescription abandonment and support medication adherence.

Waste is another significant concern in oral oncology. Cancer drugs often have undesirable side effects, which can cause patients to stop taking medication prior to completing treatment. For select cancer drugs, splitting the prescription into two fills allows Prime to make certain patients can tolerate treatment prior to shipping the second fill. By eliminating waste, the split fill program results in savings of $2,000 to nearly $4,000 per prescription.

Managing costs across both benefits

Prime Therapeutics Specialty Pharmacy (Prime Specialty Pharmacy), helps plan sponsors manage the total cost of care across both the medical and pharmacy benefit. Prime Specialty Pharmacy works with plan sponsors to implement smart benefit designs and effective utilization management programs.

Patients are educated about the importance of medication adherence and receive active support in following prescribed drug regimens from disease-focused care management teams.

Study methods

- Population: Claims from seven million members across eight Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans were reviewed to identify members with a new claim for an oral oncology medication
- Timeframe: July 2006 through June 2008
- Definition of abandonment: claim that was subsequently reversed with no evidence of a paid claim within the following 90 days

Smart management of oral oncology drugs should focus on reducing costs without negatively affecting patient care. As oral oncology medications work to halt the progression of cancer, it is essential for patients to follow their prescribed medication regimen in order to avoid potential future costly hospitalizations and medical procedures. This study suggests high out-of-pocket costs for these patients may have an adverse impact on patient care and therefore long-term costs.

References

1 Prime Therapeutics 2010 Drug Trend Insights.