Powering Launch Excellence with Patient Engagement and Support Systems

By SHAYMA ALI, VP & GM, Global Patient and Contract Sales, Commercial Engagement Services IQVIA

The pace of medical innovation remains strong, and the cadence of new product launches continues to accelerate throughout the global pharmaceutical/ lifesciences sector. In 2023, 69 novel active substances were launched — 20 percent more than the year before.[1] While this level of therapeutic innovation is promising for patients and providers, many factors make it more difficult for new therapies to enter the market successfully to achieve the full clinical and commercial success they deserve, particularly when they are entering a crowded therapeutic space.

For instance, brand teams face stiff headwinds as they work to develop the most impactful go-to-market strategies — both at launch and throughout the product's life cycle:

Disruptive patient journeys: For many patients, especially those with complex or rare disease states, obtaining an accurate diagnosis can take months and even years. This often leads to numerous (often frustrating) interactions with various physicians and specialists.

Faster launch cadence: Healthcare professionals (HCPs) face a steep learning curve as they try to keep pace with the latest therapeutic options and feel confident when comparing them to other therapies for the same disease.

Healthcare resources gap: Healthcare systems are under-resourced, both financially and in terms of staffing. More HCPs are leaving the profession than entering it, a demographic trend that has been exacerbated by the pandemic, which left many healthcare workers struggling with burnout and other health issues.

Knowledge gaps among patients and providers: Patients and HCPs often lack specific knowledge about how today's innovative therapies work, how to properly recognize and diagnose the underlying condition, how the therapy can help to slow the progression of symptoms or provide a cure, and why sustained adherence to therapy is so important.

Challenges associated with complex dosing strategies and self-administration requirements: This becomes compounded for any patient managing multiple comorbidities.

All these factors, along with other psychological and emotional issues and financial obstacles, should remain top of mind as brand teams devise their commercialization strategy and develop omnichannel patient education support (PES) programs to enable the most successful experience for the drug in the marketplace.

Medication adherence is a far-reaching challenge that has direct and indirect implications for all stakeholders throughout healthcare. Factors to blame for poor adherence can range from knowledge gaps related to the drug and the disease, complex self-administration and dosing requirements (with many of today's injectable specialty therapies administered at home), challenging side effects profiles, administrative barriers that impede access and affordability, social determinants of health (SDOH), and more.

By some industry estimates, more than half of patients fail to remain adherent to the treatment regimen prescribed by their physicians. This not only has an impact on a patient's clinical outcomes and quality of life but results in a staggering loss of potential revenue. Some estimates claim pharmaceutical/life sciences companies lose as much as 37 percent of anticipated revenue.[2–5]

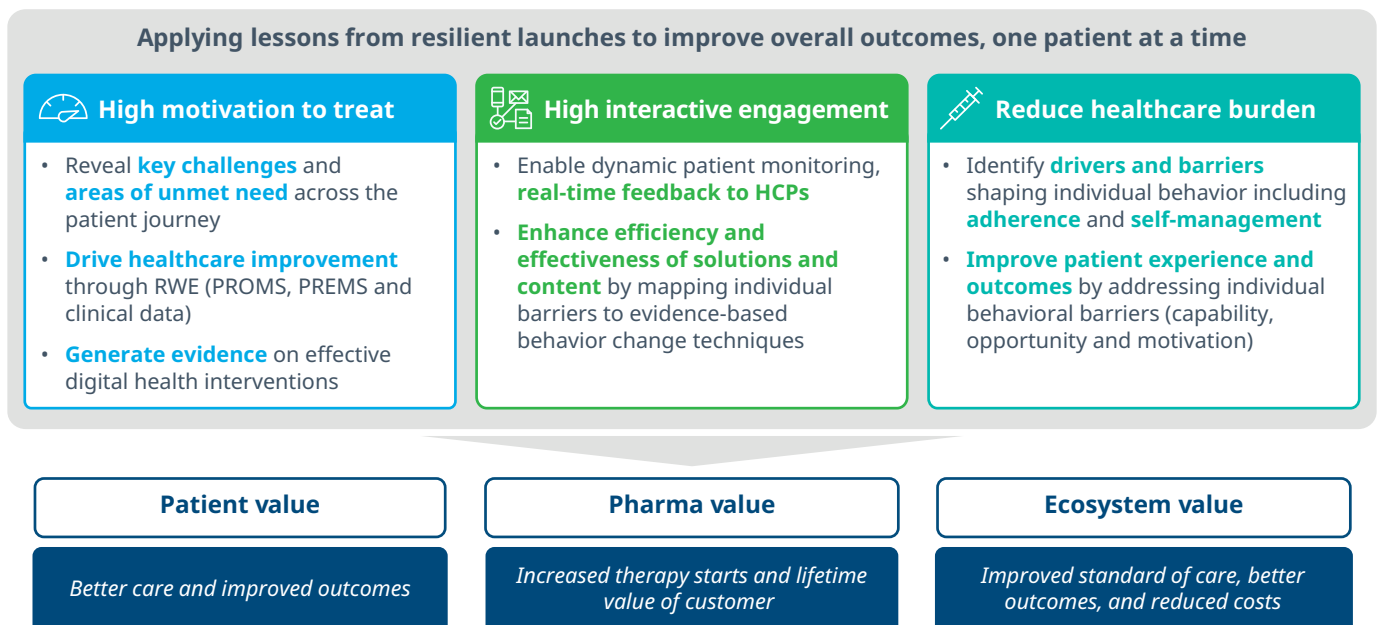The development and deployment of tailored PES programs can help pharma companies address each of these challenges. The goal is to enable today's innovative and lifesaving therapies to achieve their full potential. This includes clinical success for patients and providers and financial success for the pharma innovator.

Well-designed PES programs should anticipate specific issues patients may face and provide the targeted tools and support services they need to manage their health journey and treatment regimens to help close the adherence gap. When done successfully, brand teams have the potential to create a strategic advantage by ensuring patients start and stay on therapy and, most important, deliver a positive patient experience. This helps demonstrate therapeutic value while ensuring patient and HCP satisfaction, which in turn grows market share. These are key objectives for branded therapies, especially those entering a crowded therapeutic space.

For any branded therapy, the first six months post launch provides a strong bellwether of the product's likely success. As such, the brand team must invest time and effort during the pre-launch phase to develop the most impactful PES program for immediate rollout. The goal is to effectively educate and support patients and HCPs from day one to facilitate the strongest brand launch possible and continue to expand its presence and reputational value in the market over time.

The broad impact of a robust PES program

The ability to anticipate and remove specific barriers that patients face provides demonstrable benefits to all stakeholders.

Applying lessons from resilient launches to improve overall outcomes, one patient at a time

High motivation to treat
- Reveal **key challenges** and **areas of unmet need** across the patient journey
- **Drive healthcare improvement** through RWE (PROMS, PREMS and clinical data)
- **Generate evidence** on effective digital health interventions

High interactive engagement
- Enable dynamic patient monitoring, **real-time feedback to HCPs**
- **Enhance efficiency and effectiveness of solutions and content** by mapping individual barriers to evidence-based behavior change techniques

Reduce healthcare burden
- Identify **drivers and barriers** shaping individual behavior including **adherence** and **self-management**
- **Improve patient experience and outcomes** by addressing individual behavioral barriers (capability, opportunity and motivation)

Patient value

Better care and improved outcomes

Pharma value

Increased therapy starts and lifetime value of customer

Ecosystem value

Improved standard of care, better outcomes, and reduced costs

Incorporating PES strategies in launch planning is no longer a "nice to have" but a critical step to enable launch excellence.

For patients, an effective PES program can:

- Streamline access to prescribed therapies
- Reduce affordability challenges
- Provide educational support related to both disease and therapy
- Provide resources to manage side effects and reduce the overall treatment burden
- Improve clinical outcomes by reducing disease progression and morbidity/mortality and enhance quality of life
- Provide access to digital tools and human-support resources
- Increase connection to patient communities and advocacy groups

For pharma/life sciences companies, an effective PES program can:

- Improve patient/prescriber experience and satisfaction with the therapy and create a strong brand reputation
- Increase long-term adherence and reduce brand switching
- Strengthen the brand team's ability to validate successful launch and access strategies and demonstrate the therapy's long-term value
- Maximize commercial success and return on investment (ROI) for their innovative therapiesIncrease connection to patient communities and advocacy groups

For payers and the health system, an effective PES program can:

- Foster sustained adherence and a reduction of preventable medical episodes and disease progression, therefore reducing the cost of care
- Streamline the overall healthcare system management
- Enable better tracking of population-wide health data

Using personalized engagement and support provides a key differentiator at launch

The types of challenges patients face are complex and varied. Many patients feel overwhelmed by complicated self-administration routines or unpleasant side effects. Similarly, other physiological and emotional issues make it hard for some patients to manage complex disease and drug regimens. For some, the most daunting challenges may be administrative, logistical, and/or financial issues that make it hard to access prescribed medications or remain adherent to therapy. All these factors can cause the discontinuation of therapy.

Against this backdrop, it is now widely recognized that reliance on one-size-fits-all interventions have proven to be ineffective. Instead, brand teams should aim to provide scaffolding and support programs by combining an innovative blend of high-touch and high-tech program elements to help ensure the most successful launch and market uptake for the therapy.

In general, the types of challenges that undermine patient adherence fall into four categories, each of which can be addressed by specific PES tools and program offerings.

Improve patient screening, activation and outreach:

- Disease awareness and education campaigns
- Pathway design support to enhance disease diagnosis, and treatment pathways to enhance patient identification, referral and quality of care
- Tools to improve patient identification, outreach and activation
- Patient reviews
- Referral navigation
- Screening and diagnostic services

Broaden care by addressing success for patients:

- Benefits-verification tools
- Prior authorization support
- Reimbursement claims support

Remove financial hurdles with affordability solutions for patients and caregivers:

- Co-pay solutions
- Crowdfunding options
- Deferred payment options
- Financial assistance navigation
- Financial testing support (to ensure full or partial coverage of required lab testing)
- Charitable programs and other free goods opportunities
- Payment facilitation
- Refund/subsidy support
- Vouchers

Improve adherence with a holistic approach to help patients live healthier lives:

- Adherence/persistence support
- Allied care services
- Behavior-change support
- Care coordination
- Clinical care resources
- Education and training
- Logistical support
- Patient monitoring
- Patient health management
- Risk assessment and management

Use a mix of messaging modalities to address unmet patient needs

The most effective PES programs should provide a tailored array of high-tech and high-touch offerings that anticipate and address all the issues patients face. The goal is to help individuals find the information and resources they need to overcome the specific barriers they are likely to encounter. These program elements are intended to close knowledge gaps, support behavior change, increase therapy starts and improve both clinical outcomes and quality of life for the patient.

A comprehensive PES program should leverage the latest digital strategies and technologies along with options that give patients and prescribers streamlined access to patient engagement specialists [3-4] for instance, using various data analytics techniques and behavioral science insights to segment patients and better understand their preferences. These insights can then inform content creation, optimize delivery across multiple channels and harness the power of generative artificial intelligence to create more personalized content.

When patients are provided with the right mix of personalized information in various formats, they are more likely to stay on therapy. This can improve clinical outcomes, decrease mortality/morbidity, and reduce avoidable medical interventions and their related costs ¾ and in doing so, can improve quality of life.

Many pharma brand teams work with a partner to develop PES programs. These partners demonstrate experience and domain expertise related to best-in-class digital technologies, AI and modeling capabilities.

They are also able to leverage local and global operational teams, which helps to expand the reach without requiring additional internal staffing. The goal is to create a highly integrated, easy-to-use and scalable ecosystem that brings together a diverse array of support programs and tools that patients/physicians can access to overcome actual challenges they face on a day-to-day basis as they manage complex health journeys. Incorporating an effective PES program before, during and after the product launch is no longer a "nice to have" but is a critical step to optimizing success for both patients and the product.

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