

A Case for Why Health Systems Should Partner with Pharmacies

BY WILLIAM H. SHRANK, MD

The health care industry is now focusing on value-based care — improving the health of populations while reducing costs. As providers aim to compete in this new business context, they are partnering with firms whose data and services can increase care coordination and prevent disease. At CVS Health, we believe that community retail pharmacies play a critical role in that effort — a view confirmed by our experience in over 60 health-system partnerships across the United States. Those relationships are successful because they build on five realities in population health management.

1. Health happens between doctor visits. The overwhelming majority of health care costs involve managing patients with chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and asthma. Those patients must maintain a healthful lifestyle (through diet and exercise) and stick to their medication regimens (what health professionals call “medication adherence”).

Only about half of patients take their medications as prescribed. Even when patients are offered medications at no cost to them after a heart attack, adherence is typically not much better than 50%. In the United States, prescription non-adherence is estimated to cost about \$300 billion annually, and the use of generic medications for chronic conditions may be the most cost-effective management approach in medicine today.

Patients with chronic conditions typically see their primary care provider a few times a year but visit their community pharmacy several times a month. They often form a personal relationship with a pharmacist, without being restricted to an appointment schedule. So it's not surprising that pharmacists have the greatest positive influence, compared

with other health professionals, on patients' medication adherence.

Pharmacists are trained to know about medications, and they focus on them all day. They also have direct access to real-time data about patients' medication use. By partnering more closely with retail pharmacies, health systems have a chance to promote better medication adherence and to keep patients healthier between visits to the doctor.

2. Medication adherence is a team sport. Patients have many reasons for not taking their medications, including lack of understanding of the treatment, misperceptions about asymptomatic conditions, cultural beliefs, drug costs, therapy complexity, and cognitive and logistical challenges. Evidence shows that team-based, multifaceted strategies are essential to addressing this array of obstacles to adherence. Toward that end, CVS Health invests in a broad suite of practical interventions to help patients stick to their medication regimens:

- We offer a refill synchronization program and are piloting multi-dose packaging, to help patients reduce their number of trips to the pharmacy and to make it easier to follow a complex medication regimen. (Of course, patients always have the option to visit or call the pharmacy with questions.)
- Our pharmacists use motivational interviewing techniques when counseling patients. This direct engagement encourages medication adherence and healthier behavior.
- We offer high-touch specialty services from the convenience of our local retail pharmacies. For example, our dedicated help lines provide phone support to patients who need it as they follow their medication regimens.

- We connect with health care providers, via direct messaging in their electronic medical records systems, when patients neglect to fill or refill a prescription. This approach supplies providers with critical information as they titrate and optimize therapy for their patients.
- We support patients' family members in their caregiving roles. For example, we encourage caregivers to use our online and mobile-app services to manage their loved ones' prescription regimens more conveniently.

3. You are what you buy. In a widely publicized effort, we stopped selling cigarettes at CVS retail pharmacies in 2014. We subsequently observed meaningful reductions in smoking rates in regions where we have a large market share. That's not surprising, given that about 5% of patients who go to a pharmacy to pick up prescribed medications for hypertension, asthma, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease buy cigarettes during that visit to the pharmacy. By encouraging patients to use pharmacies that do not sell cigarettes, health systems and providers can reduce the greatest known source of preventable illness.

4. In population health, data is king. CVS has a massive amount of pharmacy data. Lack of access to that data is a blind spot for many health systems — one they can address through a formal partnership with a retail pharmacy. We use the power of our data at CVS to improve medication adherence, both in direct consultation with patients and by connecting with health care providers.

Our Pharmacy Advisor program, for instance, allows our pharmacists to identify, in real time, which patients are late in filling or refilling their prescriptions — and then to call those patients. Tens of millions of these calls have improved medication adherence so that the payer gets a three-dollar return on investment for every dollar spent.

Our sophisticated pattern-recognition tool, the Predictive Adherence Index, uses pharmacy claims to predict which patients are most likely not to follow their medication regimens. Therefore, we can call at-risk

patients proactively (before they miss filling or refilling a prescription) or, using the Pharmacy Advisor, in a timely way thereafter.

In addition, our Vulnerable Patient Index (VPI) tool identifies which patients are likely to incur high total medical costs. We provide the VPI scores to our pharmacists, who conduct comprehensive medication reviews with the identified patients to encourage them to administer their medications safely and as prescribed.

5. Retail health care is good for health systems. As providers increasingly participate in value-based purchasing arrangements, what used to be profit centers have become cost centers. Recent studies show that retail clinics deliver high-quality, low-cost care for the narrow set of services they deliver, such as care for sore throats, ear infections, or urinary tract infections. These services are especially useful in the evening and on weekends, when emergency room visits may be the only alternative. Retail clinics are also becoming first-line providers of preventive services, such as vaccinations and wellness counseling for smoking cessation and weight loss.

Furthermore, CVS's use of the Epic health record system in our Minute Clinics allows us to send visit summaries to a patient's primary care provider in real time, with the patient's consent. We are also developing joint clinical programs between our Minute Clinics and primary care providers from our health-system affiliates. For example, we check the blood pressure of all patients who visit the Minute Clinic. Those with hypertension are advised to visit their doctor for evaluation and management, and some are then followed up in the Minute Clinic. By moving more of this ongoing care into patients' neighborhoods, pharmacies that are connected with health systems can help everyone conveniently access simple, low-cost services.

At CVS, we recognize that health systems and pharmacies share the goal of improving patients' health while lowering costs. And we have found a variety of ways to use affiliations with health systems to achieve that goal. In an era of value-based care, pharmacies and health systems should partner with each other to achieve both higher-quality population health and greater strength in the business of delivering care.

SPONSOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Improving Outcomes by Erasing the “Integration Deficit”

How the Application of Technology and Use of Data Will Lead to Gains in Patient Outcomes While Reducing Costs

We live in a world where our personal devices—whether they're in our pocket, car or home—can seamlessly share real-time data with each other. But the same cannot be said for a much more important area of our lives—healthcare. That's because many of the systems that record and store healthcare data across the care continuum are not integrated. Erasing this so-called integration deficit is a critical next step in healthcare's evolution as we transition to value-based healthcare.

While many stakeholders see the potential for improved collaboration, the misaligned incentives of many healthcare systems make the prospects for integration a significant challenge. Repeated tests, recurring readmissions, and an incomplete picture of a patient's overall health are often the result. By working together to manage patient care holistically, the healthcare industry can improve clinical and financial outcomes.

So if the lack of integration is the problem, how do we start working toward a solution? More connected medical technologies—implanted and otherwise—can and should play a crucial role, as will better use of data to help healthcare professionals see a broader view of their patients. Today, many of Medtronic's technologies are actively generating data, and we are working with the global healthcare community to take our technology, services, and insights and fashion them into solutions that either augment the delivery of care through better patient care management or improve overall system efficiency.

In the spirit of progress and partnership, our work includes:

- Utilizing insulin pump technology, sensors and mobile applications to better manage patients outside of the hospital setting in the Netherlands,
- Combining implanted heart failure technologies, diagnostic sensors, and nursing support to keep heart failure patients out of VA hospitals,
- Collaborating with IBM Watson to identify better care management for diabetes patients by using the patient's own data,
- Working with hospitals to allow quicker patient discharges by giving doctors and nurses the ability to monitor patient care and progress remotely,
- Partnering with hospitals to manage their cath labs for better patient throughput and outcomes, and
- Working on-site at hospitals to drive improvements in efficiency, quality, clinical outcomes, and patient experience, all within an outcomes-based payment model.

As we've seen in our efforts, the successful integration of patient care will require collaboration between providers, suppliers, physicians and payers. At Medtronic, we believe we have an important role to play in the integration of healthcare. There's an opportunity to harness the data and insights our technologies produce to create a more integrated, patient-centered healthcare system—one that ultimately is set up to achieve and reward the long-term outcomes that are central to a value-based healthcare system.

Learn more about our perspective on integrating care and value-based healthcare [here](#).

Medtronic

ABOUT MEDTRONIC

Through innovation and collaboration, Medtronic improves the lives and health of millions of people each year. Learn more about our technology, services and solutions at Medtronic.com.