OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

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IT'S THE STUFF THAT LIFE'S MADE OF, AND THE KEY TO GOOD CARE

Nursing staff and physician/prescribers need and want more of their time spent on direct resident care and less time spent with administrative duties that divert attention away from one-on-one care delivery.

Omnicare recognizes the extensive amount of staff time it takes to manage pharmaceutical services, from obtaining prior authorizations to reordering routine medications, to preparing multitudinous doses of medications with each medication pass. Omnicare has created several unique pharmacy innovations, all designed to give its customers what they really need: time.

At Omnicare, we have streamlined prior authorizations through collaborative practice, re-engineered convenient multi-dose packaging drug delivery systems, strengthened supply chain management to maximize medication inventories, and expanded automation of new and refill medication orders, all while enhancing quality and patient safety.

A pandemic could have stalled our innovation, but Omnicare's talented workforce rallied even harder, knowing that the most important thing we could provide customers was the gift of time.

Nancy Losben
R.Ph., CCP, FASCP, CG
Senior Director, Quality
Omnicare, a CVS Health Company

STREAMLINING AUTHORIZATIONS

PARTNERSHIPS AND TECHNOLOGY EMPOWER PHARMACISTS TO WORK QUICKLY AND EFFICIENTLY ON PROVIDERS' BEHALF

By Kimberly Marselas

Despite great working relationships with their pharmacists, many skilled nursing providers still must endure a time-consuming process to ensure they'll be reimbursed when a resident starts a new medication.

Prior authorization (PA) requirements are especially challenging in the long-term care sector, whereby prescribers often travel between sites and may be less inclined to submit PA requests electronically.

Insurers reject about 0.75% of prescriptions for Omnicare patients citing required prior authorization. That's no small number considering the millions of scripts the nation's largest long-term care pharmacy fills monthly.

In some cases, completing all the steps to get that pre-approval and receive notification from the insurer can take weeks. In others, it may approach a month.

But skilled nursing facilities — especially those focused on short-term patients or intentionally working to reduce lengths of stay in light of

regulatory and payment pressures — can't afford to wait.

"In the LTC environment, we don't have that luxury all the time," says Philip Price, RPh, senior manager of the Omnicare Clinical Intervention Center. "Regulations require us to move as quickly as possible and jump over a lot of hurdles."

Omnicare is encouraging innovative practices and harnessing the power of technology to speed up the prior authorization process and ease the burden on healthcare partners. The use of electronic prior authorizations, or ePAs, and collaborative practice agreements, or CPAs, alone or in

combination, can reduce wait times, ensure compliance and reduce the amount of work for on-site staff.

PARTNER WITH PHARMACISTS

Third-party insurers, including Medicare and Medicaid, are most likely to reject prescriptions for high-dollar drugs like biologics or those without generic alternatives and medications that are known to pose additional risks when used in elderly patients. That, however, doesn't negate their necessity in most cases.

"Third parties want to be sure drugs aren't being dispensed for unapproved uses," Price says. "But the process can be a difficult one. We work with our customers to make sure they don't go without."

Without PA, Omnicare will provide a short supply of the drug and continue pursuing coverage. When overrides are granted, nursing homes may receive payments backdated up to 90 days.

But knowing with certainty that the prescriptions are appropriate and covered is always best. Collaborative agreements can deliver that certainty in much less time.

"We've gone from the entire process taking weeks to now just days, and maybe hours with the addition of electronic prior authorizations," says Kathleen Beitzel, Omnicare's senior director of pharmacy support services.

Traditionally, three factors have complicated or slowed completion of the PA process:
    1. Gathering the necessary clinical information from the nursing home
    2. Tracking down the prescriber for a signature before submission, especially when that prescriber splits time between multiple locations
    3. Receiving the approval once it's been granted, as they are typically sent only to the resident or the prescriber, and not to the pharmacy of record.

In some cases, prescribers actually abandon their preferred medication so they don't have to complete the additional paperwork required.

"The prescribers are as frustrated as we are because it takes a lot of time," Price says.

A collaborative practice agreement (CPA) removes most of those challenges by delegating a pharmacist who can stand in for the prescriber. Omnicare's clinical operations staff is then able to access electronic medical records to submit objective patient information such as diagnoses and lab results that justify the prescription. They can sign a submission on behalf of the prescriber. And they receive automatic notification when fills are approved.

UNDERSTAND CPA PROTOCOLS

Collaborative practice agreements can be used to address a variety of disease-management needs, allowing a pharmacist to gather necessary clinical information and take action within predetermined parameters.

To that end, such agreements have been endorsed by the National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations, the American Pharmacists Association, the American Medical Association and others.

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They're gaining in popularity among Omnicare customers because they make it easier to address patients' needs quickly — and they ease the burden on other members of the providers' clinical care team.

"CPAs are built upon a foundation of trust between pharmacists and prescribers and serve as a useful mechanism for increasing efficiencies of team-based care," the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in its 2017 guide "Advancing Team-Based Care Through Collaborative Practice Agreements."

"When designed correctly, CPAs are beneficial to the collaborative delivery of care through delegation by the physician or other prescriber of specific patient care services to pharmacists. This delegation can expand available services to patients and increase coordination of care.

"For example, the use of CPAs can decrease the number of requests to authorize refills, modify prescriptions, initiate therapeutic interchanges (in which the pharmacist can substitute another drug for the medication prescribed), and order and interpret laboratory tests, while keeping the prescriber apprised of the pharmacist's actions through established communication mechanisms."

> ## "WE ARE IN SOME WAYS BREAKING NEW GROUND HERE, SO WE'VE BEEN VERY, VERY CAREFUL TO ENSURE COMPLIANCE."

While the CDC has encouraged their use to manage cardiovascular disease and hypertension, they've been used by a range of providers such as hospitals seeking to reduce readmissions and community health centers undertaking immunization initiatives.

Omnicare began rolling out CPAs more than a year ago, focusing early efforts on states with regulations that allow for such partnerships and have a large number of long-term care residents.

They are now in place with facilities in 10 states, being used routinely to speed up the approval process. As Omnicare pursues additional agreements, the company remains mindful of uses that could further benefit residents, such as agreements that cover the management of anticoagulation therapies or other disease-state management.

"As the healthcare system continues to evolve, pharmacists are being leveraged to deliver such patient care services, decreasing repetitive outreach to prescribers and expediting positive healthcare outcomes," Beitzel says.

CLICK AND SEND

Electronic prior authorizations (ePAs) address a similar need and are often used with collaborative practice agreements.

Traditionally, authorization requests have been sent by fax, wait for the insurer's attention and then have to be sent back to the facility by fax. Often, the insurer may not ask for full information during the first communication, a problem that can further delay coverage. Other times, providers are asked to provide more information than needed for a particular prescription drug, creating unnecessary work for staff.

The ePA process allows the correct and required information to be submitted simply and quickly by a prescriber's representative in the nursing home. When used in conjunction with a collaborative practice agreement, Omnicare can even complete and submit the ePA on the prescriber's behalf.

"We can reduce the amount of time and information required," Price says. "Many of the electronic prior authoriziations only require simple yes or no answers and can be approvedf immediately, literally within minutes."

Omnicare's ePA platform offers a one-stop shop to send prior authorization information to Medicare and Medicaid plans and a growing number of private insurers.

Omnicare has worked closely with CMS, state agencies and pharmacy benefit managers while implementing both CPA and ePA processes. Those efforts have resulted in strategies that help patients, providers and prescribers.

"We are in some ways breaking new ground here, so we've been very, very careful to ensure compliance," Price says. "The combination of these two programs is really going to provide some significant improvements for our patients and, hopefully, reduce those non-covered charges. ∎

LOGICALLY MANAGED MEDS

CUSTOMER-FOCUSED SUPPLY CHAIN STRATEGIES PROMOTE HEALTHY PARTNERSHIPS WITH LONG-TERM CARE CLIENTS

By Kimberly Marselas

When a resident needs medication, having the right drug at the right time matters. When choosing a long-term care pharmacy, a robust approach to supply chain management matters too.

At Omnicare, customer-focused ordering and replenishment — and the backing of an extensive, multifaceted pharmaceutical network — are critical components of quality partnerships.

"It's really important that we are able to get our customers medications in time to give the patient the dose when it's due," says Stephanie Waters, PharmD, senior advisor operations support. "It's imperative that we work in partnership in that process and do everything we can to make sure they never have to miss a dose because a pharmacy had a drug that was backordered or something we were not able to get because of supply chain issues."

With hundreds of dedicated employees, an extensive warehouse and vendor network and proprietary software that anticipates needs, Omnicare is uniquely positioned to help ensure long-term care facilities remain compliant in drug delivery and patient care — even during a crisis.

By anticipating which medications are in demand among patients and specific facilities, Omnicare's internal software can place orders with outside vendors or through Omnicare warehouses to create a back-up supply in times of potential or existing pharmaceutical shortages.

"Our system has a lot of that logic built into it," says Gloria Wei, senior manager of internal operations. "We also work closely with our vendors if we anticipate additional products are required to help ensure our patients get their needed medications."

That might mean tapping an alternate supplier or identifying an alternate drug with the same capabilities. When specific medications run low, Omnicare

also has the ability to reallocate drug allotment based on the needs of specific pharmacies or regional concerns. In emergencies, that might mean centrally controlling certain medications so that any customer can get a week's supply for immediate use, rather than automatically pushing 30 days' worth of stock when ordered.

The ability to spot trends and predict use allows Omnicare to shift from building-based management to a more centrally controlled approach as needed, ensuring that each customer weathers environmental pressures on the pharmaceutical market.

While drug shortages can happen for a variety of reasons, the coronavirus pandemic and its global impact on drug manufacturing introduced unheard-of stressors. When COVID-19 cases took hold in China, that nation — the source of 13% of active pharmaceutical ingredients used in the U.S. market — shuttered many of its chemical and manufacturing plants.

As the disease progressed across the U.S., prescribers increased reliance on 90-day supplies to limit patient visits, another potential threat to reserve supplies already in the country.

Meanwhile, efforts to boost immunity through supplements, emerging research on potential COVID-19 treatments and even temporary use authorizations from the Food and Drug Administration also increased demand for specific therapeutic drugs.

During the pandemic, Omnicare readied its strategically located warehouses to try to ensure that its long-term care clients — in hot spots and across the U.S. — had access to those suddenly high-demand prescriptions and over-the-counter medications. In the early days of the pandemic, those included hydroxychloroquine, azithromycin and spacers needed for inhalers prescribed in place of aerosol-generating nebulizers.

The CVS Health family, encompassing LTC, specialty, retail and mail-order pharmacies, was ready.

"Being as large as we are, we have a lot of buying power, and that streams into Omnicare," says Pamela Brown,

senior manager of automation internal operations. "It flows through our proprietary software system, Customer Focused Replenishment or CFRX, which anticipates dispensing and history and forecasts needs across the system and at each individual pharmacy."

Nursing homes and staff appreciate that buying power; it means Omnicare may deliver items the local pharmacy cannot.

"We have a variety of approaches that trickle down to the end user, so we as a company are anticipating their needs," Brown says. "Your patient's going to be adherent, and, together, we're able to give them the best support possible."

"TOGETHER, WE'RE ABLE TO GIVE THEM THE BEST SUPPORT POSSIBLE."

Communication is always a key component of Omnicare's supply chain management, but during the pandemic, it played an increasingly important role in helping customers navigate emerging issues ranging from infection control to personal protective equipment to emerging treatments.

At the corporate level, clinical and account management teams met virtually each week to discuss potential shortages and develop response plans. Although Waters said most of those shortfalls didn't materialize thanks to the size and capability of the Omnicare enterprise, customers were reassured and allowed to focus on many of the non-pharmaceutical concerns related to the coronavirus.

Pharmacy consultants also helped their partner facilities manage minimal delays. In the case of spacers needed for inhalers, which were backordered for a number of days nationwide, Omnicare's experts helped on-site staff safely manage nebulizer use until supplies stabilized. In other cases, those consultants identified the ideal inhalants to use, recognizing the switch couldn't be "one-size fits all."

It was also an ideal time to encourage long-term care customers to put automated solutions to use for them, says Sandra Hardman, senior director of Rx support services for LTC. Such tools include refill reminder programs; in-house automatic-dispensing machines; and pre-packaged, multidose deliveries.

Each can help clients save time when it's needed most, but together, the automated ordering programs feed Omnicare more data for better supply chain predictability. Built-in redundancies protect time-strapped staff and paint a more accurate picture of what's needed and where.

"It ramps up communication," Brown says. "If we know what the patients are taking, we can be more proactive in having what they need." ◼

AUTOMATION: BUILDING IN SAFETY WHILE SAVING TIME

By Kimberly Marselas

At Omnicare, a decades-long legacy of customer service inspires a commitment to innovative solutions that improve accuracy and help keep patients safe.

The last several years have brought a flurry of technological advances to long-term care customers, who rely on pharmacists to save them time and money while meeting ever-changing regulatory requirements.

"Omnicare has long held the belief that the less time the facility staff spends on refills and pharmacy orders, the more time they can spend caring for their patients," says Derrick Sturgill, the company's senior director of internal operations for long-term care. "Everything from dosage, pass times, overall therapy, insurance, allergies, and a complete patient profile are fundamental to patient safety and compliance."

The key is in capturing patient and prescription information efficiently and putting it to use wisely.

Smart technologies, such as automation that streamlines ordering or dispensing, can ensure patients' overall well-being; keep facilities in compliance with federal, state and local regulations; and usher in a more comprehensive approach to medication management.

Omnicare's recent innovations include:
- Multidose packaging
- In-pharmacy automation technologies that provide multi-faceted medication checks to improve accuracy and reduce human error
- Gold-standard clinical programs that support consultant pharmacists as they make recommendations, implement adherence programs and manage therapies.

"The idea of automation is not to make it easier for the pharmacy," explains Nancy Losben, RPh,

Omnicare's senior director for quality. "There will always be diligence on our part because it's a very exact science. What we hope to do is reduce the time and energy nursing home staff have to commit to ordering and med passes."

MULTIDOSE PACKAGING

One of the most popular strategies helping time-strapped skilled nursing facilities make med passes more efficient is multidose packaging.

Doses of multiple medications are pre-portioned into individual cellophane envelopes or booklets for each resident at each med pass. Resident information and individual medications are listed on the back, ensuring dosing accuracy for the resident and making triple-checking easier than ever for staff.

"The use of innovative, multidose packaging in assisted living and long-term care makes it very convenient for nurses to find the right medications," says Losben. "That equals time saved. The fact that medications don't have to be punched out of a card also means the opportunity for error is decreased."

Multidose options also boost compliance efforts in other ways, such as electronic identification and verification of all medications within the packaging. This is in addition to the final pharmacist check. They can be delivered in seven- , 14- or 15-day supplies, avoiding overages while ensuring residents have the treatments they need. And individual packaging improves infection control practices, limiting handling of bottles and drawers during med passes.

For more independent residents, new booklet versions offer an on-the-go solution. Losben says some assisted living providers are allowing staff to administer pills packaged in multidose booklets during outings so that residents don't have to rush home.

AUTOMATED ORDERING AND DISPENSING

Automatic dispensing units, or ADUs, can offer safe and compliant emergency and first dosing onsite, allowing for increased patient care.

There are many cabinet types and configurations, but the standard for Omnicare is the Omnicell. Found in both acute and post-acute settings, the Omnicells can house upwards of 400 different medications and can be customized according to the needs of the patient base of the facility.

"It's real-time, on-time," Losben says. "It is astonishing to see in action. When nurses get accustomed to automatic dispensing machines, they never want to get rid of them."

These dispensing units are considered extensions of the pharmacies and are regulated by the respective states' boards of pharmacy. As such, there are security requirements for where the cabinets may be located in the facilities and who is allowed access to the cabinets. This gives both the facility and the pharmacy increased oversight of the medications and is a highly effective deterrent for diversion. This additional oversight also alleviates the need to complete daily hand counts of controlled medications by the nursing staff. Any discrepancies are flagged through electronic reporting and researched by the pharmacy, in partnership with the facility staff.

These ADUs have become an essential part of patient care and the reliance on them has become more prevalent during the COVID pandemic. Many states have made provisions to their regulations and have allowed nurses to restock the cabinets. This diminishes any potential exposure to the facility, while maintaining the necessary access to needed medications. To support nursing staff, Omnicare provided training videos and easy-to-follow instructions for restocking functions, in addition to their local pharmacy support.

WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

While ADUs can provide a multitude of benefits to the patient and nursing staff alike, there still more ways Omnicare provides time-saving innovations to allow staff members more continuous patient care. Though some automated processes were already widely available, Sandra Hardman, senior director of Rx support services for LTC, says the pandemic increased facilities' awareness of Omnicare's suite of services and how they work in conjunction with one another to ensure the right medication is delivered to the right patient at just the right time. Sandra Hardman, senior director of Rx support services for LTC.

With ReadyFill℠, for instance, a nurse can review each unit's needed medications weekly, then simply click those requiring a refill. Medications arrive throughout the month so facilities never have a gap. Omnicare recently launched a "light" version of ReadyFill, in which PDFs offer a reviewable redundancy to make sure ordering doesn't slip through the cracks.

Even better news, notes Sturgill, is that most ordering solutions are incorporated into the dispensing form of choice. For example, with multi-dose packaging, facility staff only need to submit order changes or verify refills once a week. Refill reminders and ReadyFill programs are also incorporated into Omnicare's proprietary eMAR companion, Omniview.

"This allows staff to track refills more easily and schedule ordering at a time that works for them — not while they are in the middle of med pass and see they need to reorder," Sturgill says. ∎