

Five Critical Questions to Ask Your Specialty Distributor

By **Natalie Leverone**, Corporate Account Manager, BDI Pharma

We see it in the headlines every day—a new specialty drug is either coming out of clinical trial or has been approved. It's no surprise that the growth in U.S. drug spending is rapidly shifting from traditional to specialty drugs, especially as the development of new drugs becomes more targeted and expanded indications are being granted for previously approved drugs. ■

By 2020, projections indicate that the pharmacy industry's revenues will exceed \$483 billion, yet specialty drugs will account for almost half of these revenues.¹ In addition, more than 8 out of 10 health plans identified "moving infusions to the lowest cost sites of care" as a high priority for 2017 and 2018.²

For the home infusion setting and specialty pharmacies with infusion suites, this means opportunities to better serve the patient while supporting the cost of care. It also presents challenges in access to therapy and reimbursement.

While the traditional role of the specialty distributor is to provide fast access to the infusible drugs you need to support your patients, with today's channel pressures, your specialty distributor can and will play a critical role in offering the necessary patient-centric services that are also required to support patients in getting them access to specialty drugs and helping them to afford these therapies, especially as channel and site-of-care control is migrating from manufacturers to PBMs and payers.

Following are five key questions to ask your specialty distributor in order to build a more strategic relationship in support of a patient-centric model of care.

Do you have access to reimbursement support services that can support my pharmacy and my pharmacy's reimbursement team?

With the growth of the specialty drug market, by 2018, 50 percent of all specialty drugs will be reimbursed under medical benefit, as opposed to just 30 percent in 2012.³ Specialty drugs can be challenging and complex when it comes to claims management and reimbursement, even for the most experienced teams.

Ask your specialty distributor about reimbursement support specific to the patients you serve. They could offer insight and expertise in specific disease states, such as hemophilia, oncology or diseases that require immune globulin therapies, and support your team who might not be as experienced in the unique challenges that come with specialty drugs,

such as prior authorizations, denials and appeals. They also have more experience in limitations to the payer systems and how to navigate the payer organizations to get the help your patients need in order to access their therapies. ■

What programs and services can you access through your manufacturer relationships?

Manufacturer relationships are crucial for specialty distributors in order to have access to new specialty products. Specialty distributors work closely with manufacturers to maintain communication and sourcing; as a result, they also tend to have insights into key patient support programs offered by manufacturers that support patient uptake and adherence. Some of these patient assistance programs include:

- **Copay assistance** to support patients with out-of-pocket expenses
- **Quick start** programs that give commercial coverage patients limited access to therapy until insurance and prior authorizations are received
- **Bridge programs** for commercial coverage patients who experience changes in coverage due to a job change or other life event
- **Patient assistance programs (PAP)** for patients that are uninsured and meet specific qualifications for free drug support

Through dedicated patient support services, manufacturers can also connect patients to foundations for additional financial assistance, as well as psychosocial support. ■

How can you assist my specialty pharmacy with sales and marketing support?

The growth of a specialty distributor depends on the growth of your organization. Ask your specialty distributor about programs and services that can help you to better serve your market, build brand recognition and increase referrals. This could be in the form of sales and marketing assistance, helping your organization to build a sales development plan, providing clinical training to your team, assistance with gaining payer contracts for specific disease states or even providing brand support, such as marketing collateral or marketing campaigns. ■

Do you provide any risk-sharing programs to help support the growth of my organization?

In some cases, a specialty distributor will offer programs in which they take on the risk, or upfront cost of the specialty drug, but provide you with direct access of having the product in your inventory. Known as a consignment program, this type of inventory management eliminates the risk of running short of critical products, as well as risk of expiration before the product is used. By removing the inventory expense from your budget, you can improve immediate cash flow. ■

Is your organization involved with any advocacy groups related to the disease states that my organization serves?

In the world of specialty drugs, patient advocacy groups play a significant role in lobbying for cost control and in providing critical patient support. Specialty distributors typically have key relationships with these groups in order to stay closely connected in the patient journey. These groups provide critical disease-state education and lifestyle tips for patients dealing with rare diseases.

Administering specialty drugs can provide your organization with an opportunity to serve specific patient populations and control cost of care by administering infusions outside of the hospital setting. But you don't have to support them alone. Tap into the resources through your specialty distributor and utilize this partnership to serve your patient community and grow your competitive edge. ■



Source:

Natalie Leverone is corporate account manager for BDI Pharma, Inc., a specialty distribution company serving the blood plasma market for more than 20 years. BDI Pharma provides numerous value-added services for specialty pharmacies, home infusion centers and physician practices, including their BDIVantage Plus consignment program, Trailblazer sales and marketing assistance program and special access to RxTouchpoints, a subscription-based reimbursement support program for standard to complex case management.

Get More Information: Broadening Your Sales Strategy to Include Specialty Infusion

Wednesday May 24 ■ 1:30 pm – 3:00 pm

Natalie Leverone will share key strategies of working with a specialty distributor as part of a panel discussion that includes provider, distributor and patient perspectives on providing specialty infusion therapy.

For more information:

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¹The State of Specialty Pharmacy. Adam Fein. Pembroke Consulting, Inc. 2016 www.PembrokeConsulting.com

²Specialty Pharmacy Benefit Designs: Considerations for Shifting from the Medical to Pharmacy Benefit.

³Presentation to Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy. Auzea Hussain, MPH. Avalere Health.