

# Ensuring Specialty Medication Adherence Requires an All Out Effort

By Natalie Bedford, Senior Vice President, CenterWell Specialty Pharmacy

The cost of medication nonadherence is astronomical, reaching as high as \$528.4 billion annually. Patients taking specialty medications are particularly at risk as nonadherence to specialty medications is associated with disease progression and poor clinical outcomes, increased physician visits and preventable hospitalizations, as well as higher mortality rates – taking a toll on both the healthcare system and the lives of patients with these conditions.

It's critical to find ways to help patients stay adherent to these often life-saving treatments. Every player in the healthcare ecosystem has a responsibility to assist patients in that effort.

## Going the Extra Mile

Patients on specialty medications need extra support so they understand how to properly use and handle their treatments, in addition to receiving assistance for the physical and emotional challenges they face as a result of their disease and medications.



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CenterWell Specialty  
Pharmacy

Fortunately, specialty pharmacy, a model designed to provide customized, comprehensive and coordinated care, is proving it can do just that. In fact, research shows higher rates of adherence and reduced costs among patients using specialty pharmacies than those utilizing retail pharmacies.

CenterWell Specialty Pharmacy is focused on understanding each patient's journey and providing the holistic care they need to achieve optimal benefits and outcomes from their treatment plan. To ensure patients have the clinical and educational services customized to their needs and treatment goals, we created Centers of Excellence for specific conditions where medication adherence is of highest priority, including neuromuscular conditions, pulmonary diseases, rare diseases and cancer. Staffed by teams of clinical experts, they offer customized treatment plans and are available to patients any hour of the day. Additionally, a nursing program primarily focused on keeping patients adherent, monitors those at risk for nonadherence and provides interventions and additional counseling. Supporting these efforts are advanced data-driven technologies, using risk models that stratify patients based on the presence of key drivers for adverse drug events. Our PREDICT program, allows our pharmacists to provide targeted interventions for members identified as high risk, with a goal of keeping them on therapy.

## It's More than Medicine

Specialty pharmacies often act as an extension of the provider's office and support patients by addressing a myriad of factors beyond treatment-related causes that create obstacles to adherence, such as:

- **Meeting Patients' Emotional Needs:** The mental health of a patient can have a major impact on treatment adherence. To support the emotional well-being of our patients, CenterWell Specialty Pharmacy has social worker resources available, providing patients a personal connection and counseling services, as well as acting as their advocate throughout their treatment.
- **Assisting with Finances:** The high cost of specialty medication can be a huge obstacle to adherence. CenterWell Specialty Pharmacy offers the services of financial assistance specialists to help patients navigate and obtain financial assistance through manufacturer and charitable programs.
- **Meeting Patients Where They Want to Be:** Digital tools including mobile apps, and text and email communications, have been a great advancement in promoting adherence by providing medication and refill reminders, as well as customized resources. While digital communications are effective for many patients, others prefer a more human connection through our High Touch Call Center, offering Patient Care Advocates with specialized disease and drug training to address patients' questions and concerns, and connect them with a dedicated team of nurses and pharmacists when needed.

The stakes are high for those being treated with specialty medications. CenterWell Specialty Pharmacy is continually investing, evolving and advancing our capabilities to support patients in their journey toward better medication adherence. Our pharmacy team uses an integrated approach to support their needs regardless of payer or plan, providing holistic care centered entirely on the patient. ■

*Natalie Bedford, Senior Vice President, has overall leadership responsibilities for CenterWell Specialty Pharmacy, which provides differentiated patient and provider experiences and is committed to continuing to evolve the clinical, operational and digital capabilities of the pharmacy to support patients with chronic and complex illnesses and be an extension of providers offices to support the patient journey.*