

5 Key Factors to Consider when Selecting a Specialty Pharmacy

A Healthcare Provider's Guide





Today, an estimated 133 million Americans — nearly half of the population — suffer from at least one chronic illness.

Patients with complex, chronic conditions often have complicated medication regimens. Combine this with side effect management, dietary requirements and the financial burden of expensive medications, and it can be a lot for patients to handle. The need to integrate complex therapies into patient lifestyles and current medication regimens increases the risk for nonadherence.¹ This is where specialty pharmacies come in. Specialty pharmacies have the expertise and supportive structure to help patients manage complex medications.

Today, an estimated 133 million Americans — nearly half of the population — suffer from at least one chronic illness.² If your patients aren't already getting their medications from a specialty pharmacy, it's likely that they will in the future. Specialty drugs accounted for 71 percent of the 24 drugs to gain Food and Drug Administration approval in 2016.³

As a healthcare provider, you will have a say in the specialty pharmacies your patients use — you don't always have to use the specialty pharmacy listed on the back of your patients' insurance cards. **When deciding on the right specialty pharmacy for your patients and your office staff, there are five key factors you will want to consider.**

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Select a Specialty Pharmacy that has Experts in Complex, Chronic Conditions

Having an in-depth clinical background is necessary to successfully counsel patients on their medication management. By selecting a specialty pharmacy that has an expert staff, your patients will receive personalized counseling on how to get the most from their treatment. As a healthcare provider, you want to be able to lean on your specialty pharmacy's expertise when discussing potential interactions or clinical interventions.

When weighing different specialty pharmacies, look at the staff's level of clinical knowledge and ask if they have any certifications, either in specialty pharmacy or in the conditions that affect your patients. For example, is a Board Certified Oncology Pharmacist on staff to work with your oncology patients?

Having a dedicated team for each disease state also shows a specialty pharmacy's expertise. With disease-specific teams, specialty pharmacy staff members deepen their expertise with specific patient populations. This also gives your patients and staff access to a dedicated team that can expedite any issues.

Select a Specialty Pharmacy with Resources that Help Patients

Complex medication regimens increase the risk of nonadherence, so having resources available that make medication management simple improve outcomes and lower costs. Having a chronic condition is challenging enough but not understanding it can lead to hospital readmissions and other adverse events.

Only 39 percent of patients say they're somewhat knowledgeable, at best, about how to effectively manage their chronic condition.⁴ Pharmaceutical manufacturers have medication information available but many patients require more condition-specific education. Patient education materials should include medication information but also information on managing their health and well-being. This includes resources on nutrition, side effect management and support services. Specialty pharmacies can provide this information to patients when they fill a prescription but also have it available on their websites as an online resource. This way, patients can go online to find the information they need or contact the specialty pharmacy if they have questions.

In addition to educational materials, some specialty pharmacies have support staff on hand to further counsel patients outside of their medication needs.

Having a Certified Case Manager, Registered Nurse or Registered Dietitian on staff shows a specialty pharmacy's commitment to patient support and provides patients with valuable resources.

Another resource that you should look for in a specialty pharmacy is financial assistance. It's no surprise that specialty medications can be costly and understanding health insurance can be difficult for patients when they have numerous other worries. Partner with a specialty pharmacy that can help your patients understand finances and connect patients with manufacturer co-pay programs or grant assistance to pay for costly medications.

Patient communication is another key factor to consider when selecting a specialty pharmacy. Hands-on medications require hands-on care. Eighty-eight percent of patients who want help managing their condition believe help with their treatment would make a difference in their state of health. To ensure adherence and the best possible outcomes, patients should receive regular communication, including refill reminders, from their specialty pharmacy. In a study of chronic disease patients who received a pharmacist-delivered telephone intervention two weeks after starting a new medicine, researchers found nonadherence and medication-related problems to be significantly lower in the intervention group than in the control.⁵

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of the 24 drugs that gained Food and Drug Administration approval in 2016 were specialty drugs.

Select a Specialty Pharmacy with Resources to Help Your Staff

It's important to select a specialty pharmacy with resources available to help your office and nursing staff. Your team should be spending their time taking care of patients, not following up on administrative tasks. By working with a specialty pharmacy that coordinates benefits in a timely manner, you'll be saving valuable time. This includes verifying patients' insurance information and determining the order of payers to ensure patients receive the most of their benefits.

It's frustrating to patients when they can't get their medications on time because a prior authorization is needed. Plus, there's always the possibility that the patient will get denied, requiring them to wait even longer. To help minimize therapy disruption, work with a specialty pharmacy that will help your staff with prior authorizations.

The specialty pharmacy you work with should also provide you with a dedicated account manager who can help you resolve any issues and answer questions. This go-to contact should be in regular contact with your office to ensure timely service for you and your patients.

Another helpful resource to look for is an online healthcare provider portal. Online portals streamline communication between healthcare providers and specialty pharmacies. Web portals should offer your staff a simple log in where they can check patients' statuses and communicate with specialty pharmacy staff.

Select a Specialty Pharmacy that Provides Outstanding Customer Service

Patients with complex, chronic conditions require special care and attention. It's important that the specialty pharmacy you work with treats your patients with respect and compassion and provides outstanding service to your staff. There are a few ways you can judge the customer service you will receive from a specialty pharmacy. The first is to look at patient survey results, as well as who conducted the survey. For credibility, check to see if the survey was conducted by an independent, reputable organization. To hear what others have to say, review patient and healthcare provider testimonials. You can also ask your peers which specialty pharmacies they use and see if they have any feedback.

Select an Accredited Specialty Pharmacy

Independent accreditations demonstrate a specialty pharmacy's commitment to quality and accountability. Seeking accreditation is no simple task. When seeking accreditation, specialty pharmacies must show they have policies and procedures in place to ensure safety and customer satisfaction. Pharmacies must also meet rigorous performance measures for accuracy and demonstrate a commitment to excellence in patient care.

One such independent accrediting body is The Utilization Review Accreditation Commission (URAC). URAC is dedicated to promoting healthcare quality through accreditation, education and measurement. URAC offers a wide range of quality benchmarking programs and services that model the rapid changes in the healthcare system and provide a symbol of excellence for organizations to validate their commitment to quality and accountability. Through its broad-based governance structure and an inclusive standards development process, URAC ensures that all stakeholders are represented in establishing meaningful quality measures for the entire healthcare industry.

Another reputable accrediting body you can count on is the Accreditation Commission for Health Care (ACHC). Achieving accreditation through ACHC is a process where healthcare organizations demonstrate compliance with national standards.



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In Summary

People with chronic conditions fill 91 percent of prescriptions.² When selecting a specialty pharmacy to refer your patients to, it's important that you select one that has demonstrated clinical excellence and has a hands-on patient care model in place. The right specialty pharmacy will partner with payers, pharmaceutical manufacturers and your staff to provide patients with exceptional care.



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About Amber Pharmacy

Amber Pharmacy is a specialty pharmacy that offers true best-in-class program practices that address all aspects of patients' healthcare needs. Our hands-on patient care allows patients to focus on what matters — their health and well-being. Each Amber Pharmacy patient is assigned a dedicated healthcare team which is comprised of highly experienced professionals who provide guidance and counseling on all aspects of care throughout treatment. This supportive patient care model also includes condition-specific patient education through our Promises Programs®, financial assistance services and nursing services. We also have a Registered Dietitian on staff to help patients understand how a well-balanced diet can have a positive impact on their health.

Amber Pharmacy strives to make healthcare providers' jobs easier. With a guaranteed two-hour turnaround for benefits investigations and prior authorization assistance, healthcare providers can spend more time focusing on their patients.

Amber Pharmacy also leads its peers in patient satisfaction. In national surveys conducted by Zitter Health Insights, Amber Pharmacy routinely outperforms other specialty pharmacies in the area of patient satisfaction with pharmacy employees. Amber Pharmacy also demonstrates its commitment to quality and accountability through URAC and ACHC accreditation. *For more information visit www.amberpharmacy.com.*

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