

Specialty vs. Retail Pharmacy

4 Key Differences between Retail and Specialty Pharmacies



Conditions Treated and Medication Regimens

The key difference between specialty and retail pharmacies are the conditions treated and medications dispensed. Patients often visit traditional retail pharmacies for short-term illnesses. This may include headaches, the common cold, allergies, minor injuries and more. The majority of medications dispensed by retail pharmacies need little explaining and aren't overly difficult for patients to manage.

Specialty pharmacies focus on the complex and chronic. Conditions treated by retail pharmacies require a more hands-on approach. This includes conditions like hepatitis, transplant, cancer, HIV, rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's disease and more. Medications that treat these conditions often have complicated regimens or side effects that are difficult to manage. Treating these conditions often requires more time and hands-on patient care. This is what specialty pharmacies excel at. Specialty pharmacies have the staff and infrastructure to regularly communicate with patients and offer more support, ensuring medication adherence and improved outcomes.

Treating these conditions often requires more time and hands-on patient care. This is what specialty pharmacies excel at. Specialty pharmacies have the staff and infrastructure to regularly communicate with patients and offer more support, ensuring medication adherence and improved outcomes.

“

Patient Consultation and Education

Because retail pharmacies dispense drugs that have less complicated regimens, patient education and counseling is generally high level. Patients who have questions discuss their concerns with pharmacists at retail pharmacies but pharmacists also have to juggle drive-through windows, ringing up customers and verifying insurance, in addition to filling scripts. Retail pharmacy patients may also not need counseling or have any questions because their medication regimen is easy to understand. Retail pharmacies do provide educational information via leaflets with prescription drugs, which contain drug information, potential interactions and side effects. Even though this information is useful, the format, reading level and length of this information can vary. These leaflets often lack the information patients would need to manage any potential problems.¹

Chronic conditions treated by specialty pharmacies require comprehensive patient counseling and education. It can be difficult for a patient to manage a dozen different prescriptions with different side effects. He or she may not fully understand a new diagnosis and may need some extra counseling. Only 39 percent of patients say they're somewhat knowledgeable, at best, about how to effectively manage their chronic condition.² A lack of education not only creates a poor patient experience but can also lead to adverse events. In a study of patients being discharged from the hospital, it was found that pharmacist medication review, patient counseling, and phone follow-ups were linked to a lower rate of preventable adverse drug events 30 days after hospital discharge.³

Only 39 percent of patients say they're somewhat knowledgeable, at best, about how to effectively manage their chronic condition.

Financial Burden of Medications

If a prescription is too costly at a retail pharmacy, the patient may be informed about manufacturer co-pay cards. Complex medications that treat chronic conditions can be a financial burden to patients. At specialty pharmacies, patients are often explained their financial options in great detail. In addition to providing patients with manufacturer co-pay cards, specialty pharmacies help patients apply for financial assistance through grants and foundations. Specialty pharmacies also proactively remind patients when their co-pay card or financial assistance is about to expire. This extra assistance reduces lapses in therapy which lessens the chances of preventable adverse drug events occurring.



The key difference between the two is the patient populations they treat and the types of medications dispensed.

Healthcare Provider Services

Specialty pharmacies have additional support staff that retail pharmacies do not require. This allows specialty pharmacies to help healthcare providers coordinate patient benefits and closely monitor patient adherence. Specialty pharmacies will often verify patients' insurance information and determine the order of payers to ensure patients receive the most of their benefits. Specialty pharmacies also assist with prior authorizations.

Both retail and specialty pharmacies provide valuable services to patients and strive to improve the health of the communities they serve. The key difference between the two is the patient populations they treat and the types of medications dispensed. Specialty pharmacies excel at providing hands-on patient care to patients with complex, chronic conditions. They also provide personalized care by offering additional resources, such as patient education and financial assistance, to help patients improve their health and well-being.

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.*



References

1. A. G. Winterstein, S. Linden, & A. E. Lee (2010). Evaluation of Consumer Medication Information Dispensed in Retail Pharmacies. *Archives of Internal Medicine*. 170(15) 1317-1324.
2. (2017) Strengthening Chronic Care. West Corporation, 1-17.
3. J. L. Schnipper, J. L. Kirwin, & M. C. Cotugno (2006). Role of Pharmacist Counseling in Preventing Adverse Drug Events After Hospitalization. *Archives of Internal Medicine*. 166(5) 565-571.