

Express Scripts Canada's Solution for Specialty Medications – Simplifying healthcare for complex patients



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There is a growing understanding in the benefits industry that one way to control drug plan costs is to give more attention to patients taking specialty drugs. After all, **specialty medications account for only 2% of total claims**, but an astonishing 31% of total spending. This is up from 15% of total spending as recently as 2008, and the trend shows no signs of abating.

But simply focusing more attention on this group of patients is not enough. The challenge is how to optimize spending in the specialty area while continuing to deliver the highest quality care to patients who, in most cases, are dealing with life-changing illnesses. With science making advances every day in the treatment of devastating conditions like cancer, hepatitis and other auto-immune diseases, nobody wants to restrict access to drugs that in some cases are the difference between life and death.

Instead, Express Scripts Canada (ESC) has developed one of the most advanced solutions for specialty medications in Canada, which does not limit access to medication, but does increase the chances that prescribed medications will be used to achieve optimal health outcomes. The difference is in the details of how the solution is designed, and those details are based on ESC's vast knowledge of drug claiming behaviour, gained through years of processing health claims for millions of Canadians.

Let's take a look at some of those details:

When patients take advantage of ESC's specialty solution, they are often already taking specialty medications as well as other medications on an ongoing basis to manage other conditions that may or may not be related to the specialty condition.

Difference #1 Helping the patient understand their treatment

Patients taking specialty medications can often be overwhelmed with a recent diagnosis and a barrage of instructions and other information about their treatment. This often comes from 2, 3 or more health care providers, and the confusion may be exacerbated by the unsolicited opinions of friends and family, and perhaps a number of internet searches. A highly trained professional from ESC will ask probing questions to determine the patient's understanding of their condition and treatment, and answer any questions the patient has.

Difference #2 Optimizing therapies

With the patient's permission, the ESC specialty pharmacist can review the patient's medication history and recommend adjustments where warranted in consultation with the patient's physician. If the patient is under the care of a number of different healthcare professionals (family doctor, specialists, etc.), there may be potential negative interactions between the different medications, and the patient may even be taking multiple medications to treat the same condition.



Difference #3

Personalized support from a specialized team



ESC specialty pharmacists work directly with patients to develop a personalized care plan for every patient. After putting the plan in place, the pharmacist will follow up with the patient at regular intervals to monitor patient progress and to make adjustments as needed. This highly personalized clinical model connects patients with pharmacy professionals who specialize in their particular condition.

Difference #4

Helping patients manage their costs

Medication cost is a significant factor that can impact patient adherence to therapy. With commonly prescribed medications that are used to treat chronic conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure, cost may be less of an issue because workplace benefit plans often cover the majority of costs of a patient's ongoing therapy. With specialty drugs however, which can cost ten to a hundred times as much as traditional drugs, even the most generous drug plans are unlikely to cover the entire cost. So even patients faced with a cancer diagnosis may not fill a specialty prescription and/or take it as directed when faced with significant out of pocket costs. The data backs this up. In 2017, more than half of all patients taking medication for cancer were deemed non-adherent, meaning that they took significantly less of their medication than was prescribed. One reason could be that patients simply can't afford to pay hundreds, or thousands, of dollars a month out-of-pocket, even for potentially life-saving medications. ESC offers help in accessing a variety of financial assistance programs that exist, both public and private.

Difference #5

Helping the patient take medication as directed

ESC's solution for specialty medications is designed with a number of convenient features that help patients stay on track with their treatment. These include delivery of medication to the location that best meets the needs of the patient, automated refill and renewal reminders.

Coverage for specialty medications is a critical element of any drug plan, and no employer wants to deprive their employees of these important therapies because of cost. Express Scripts Canada developed its specialty solution to give plan sponsors who are struggling with their drug plan costs an option that allows them to maintain this key component of their plan, while managing costs with the future in mind.

