

Service Review

Patient Assistance Program Rankings:

Going Beyond Sales Force Effectiveness to Customer Experience Satisfaction

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According to U.S. Census Bureau data, 47 million people did not have health coverage in 2006. This number and other statistics about the uninsured are rising. With the election of Barack Obama and his selection of Tom Daschle as Secretary of HHS, a new emphasis on national healthcare reform to address this problem is promised (see article in this issue: "Critical: A Review of Dashle's Health Reform Agenda").

Help Needed Today

Today, however, physicians are challenged to provide adequate care—including life-saving medications—to all their patients and look to the pharmaceutical industry for help.

Many physicians, for example, depend upon free samples from drug companies to help their patients who cannot afford prescribed medications. Robert Green, DO, FAOA, a primary care physician from Connecticut, speaking at a pharma industry conference, said that he and many other doctors have had patients that were kept alive by samples due to their inability to pay for prescriptions (see "A Crisis in Professional Detailing"; PMN Reprint #37-02: <http://tinyurl.com/6gpd6l>).

A healthcare practitioner respondent to a recent Pharma Marketing News survey about free drug samples said "For my indigent clinic patients who lack Medicaid coverage samples have become a very important source. These are people who cannot afford even the generic medication. The drug companies have been helpful in supplying free medication on request for these people." (See "Free Drug Samples: The Rep's Last Great Hope?"; PMN Reprint #79-01: <http://tinyurl.com/5kptqe>).

Recently, however, the distribution of free drug samples to physicians by pharmaceutical sales reps has become a hot issue among critics who claim that the practice is nothing more than a marketing tactic that contributes to the high cost of drugs. Many physician practices and medical schools have prohibited their physicians from accepting free drug samples. Thus, another door to physician access is closing.

"While free samples clearly play a valuable role in helping millions of financially-struggling patients get access to the medicines they need to live healthier lives, patients should know there are other options," said Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) Senior Vice President Ken Johnson (see "PhRMA Statement on Free Pharmaceutical Samples": <http://tinyurl.com/497jn7>).

The Patient Assistance Program Alternative

Among the "other options" patients have to get access to the medicines they need are the over 200 Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs) sponsored by pharmaceutical and biotech companies. Patient assistance programs are offered by pharmaceutical companies to help low-income, under-insured, or uninsured individuals and families afford necessary medications, with reduced-cost or free prescription drugs.

An Important Customer Touch Point

"In recent years Patient Assistance Programs have become an important customer touch point that shapes and influences a physician's experience with a pharmaceutical provider by helping to ensure patients in need receive their required medications," said Peter Carlin, Senior Vice President of Market Strategies International's Healthcare division, which recently completed its 2008 MSImage Oncology Patient Assistance Program survey of physicians.



Peter Carlin

Market Strategies International is a full-service custom and syndicated research and strategic consulting firm whose corporate headquarters is located in Livonia, Michigan.

"PAPs, along with other touch points such as call centers, clinical trial studies, reimbursement support and sales rep interactions all influence a customer's experience with a company," Carlin said.

MSImage Oncology Patient Assistance Program

Market Strategies' 2008 MSImage Oncology Patient Assistance Program was released to its subscribers in October, 2008. The questionnaire was fielded via the Internet among 150 office-based Oncologists and 100 Oncology Practice Managers in August, 2008. Physicians and practice managers were recruited from a nationally representative e-research panel.

Novartis and Genentech were ranked at the top by oncologists and practice managers respectively (see Figures 1 and 2, pg. 3), but other pharmaceutical companies lag only by a narrow margin. "Given the lack of statistical significance among the leading companies, there is a clear opportunity for

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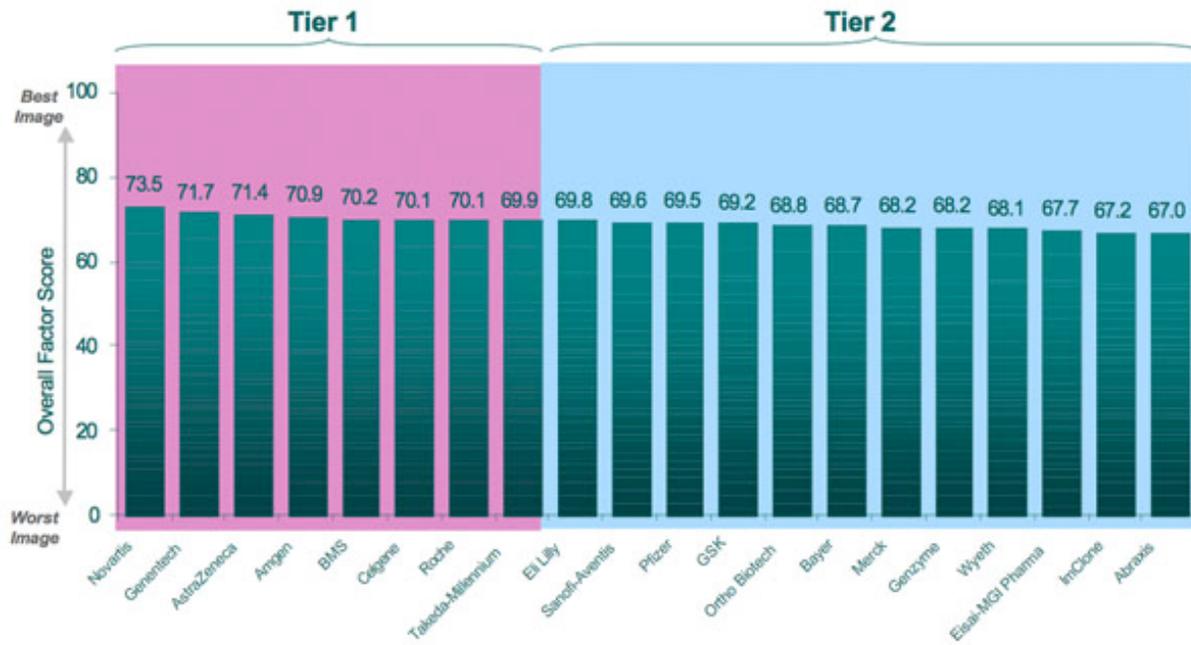


Figure 1: Company PAP Rankings by Physicians. NOTE: A difference of approximately 4.4 or more between companies denotes statistical significance at 95%. These results are courtesy of Market Strategies' MSImage Oncology Patient Assistance Program, released to subscribers in October 2008.



Figure 2: Company PAP Rankings by Practice Managers. NOTE: A difference of approximately 4.9 or more between companies denotes statistical significance at 95%. These results are courtesy of Market Strategies' MSImage Oncology Patient Assistance Program, released to subscribers in October 2008.

any company to assume leadership if they focus on improving their performance on the key drivers," Carlin said.

The Oncology Practice Manager Viewpoint

Among oncology practice managers, it is important for drug companies to have a seamless process between their reimbursement and PAP programs, have responsive call centers and easy to understand requirements. "It's very clear, that practice managers are the key stakeholder when it comes to PAP operational performance. And how a company performs on its call center is just as important as timely resolution of the application process," said Dr. Ellen Gordon, Market Strategies' Research Director.

Market Strategies' usability research on call centers has shown that this area is a growing source of frustration for oncology practices. So Gordon and her team have customized an approach for each client that evaluates call center services and helps companies improve and shape their customers' experiences and satisfaction levels.

"Putting all the pieces together requires a tremendous amount of focus and understanding of what your stakeholders want from a company," Gordon said. "Our study provides direction to those companies that want to build solid relationships with their customers and improve their overall experience with their company."

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Live Talk Show & Podcast Patient Assistance Program Rankings

LIVE Call-in Podcast and Chat!
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Join host John Mack, Editor, *Pharma Marketing News*, and guests **Peter Carlin**, SVP, and **Dr. Ellen Gordon**, Research Director, Market Strategies International's Healthcare division, in a discussion of how pharmaceutical companies can better understand what makes a successful Patient Assistance Program (PAP) and the role of PAPs in influencing a physician's experience with a drug company and improving patient health. As a case study, our guests will summarize Market Strategies' 2008 MSI Image Oncology Patient Assistance Program.

Q&A Session Included!

Listen to the live streaming audio via the Web of Call in or participate in the live chat during the show to ask questions.