10 ways clinical homecare can support your brand’s growth

A practical guide by Gaurang Majmudar

Clinical homecare has traditionally been seen by some as just a supply chain option, but it is fast being regarded as an integral part of brand strategy.

Homecare is an important supply route providing a personalised service to patients with long-term conditions (chart 1) and the sector is growing rapidly with an estimated value of around £1.2bn in 2010 (chart 2).

According to the National Clinical Homecare Association (NCHA) in 2009 over 150,000 patients in the UK received services from its members.

The Government White Paper, Liberating the NHS: Equity and Excellence sets out a vision of greater patient choice and control over care and treatment, to be realised by 2013/2014. Homecare will play a pivotal role in helping to achieve these objectives. It already provides alternatives for patients in secondary care, and there are many further treatment areas which lend themselves to this approach with great potential for further growth of the sector.

Used strategically, the homecare route can be a powerful way to support your brand. Homecare companies have a direct relationship with the patient and work closely with NHS clinical teams.

A homecare company can tailor its services around your product to maximise its benefits to the patient and help differentiate your brand in the market.
The professional support provided means that patients receiving homecare are far less likely to abandon treatment programmes and are better able to manage their medication as their condition progresses. This results in greater patient satisfaction and potentially far better treatment outcomes.

Homecare can be highly cost-effective and there is growing potential to work with a provider to achieve results and open up new opportunities for your product.

1. DIFFERENTIATE YOUR BRAND IN THE MARKET
How can you make your product stand out? In a market where homecare isn’t the norm, a good package designed to support patients and the clinical team could easily make your product a more desirable choice.

But how do you differentiate your product in an area where homecare is the norm? The key is that the service is designed for your patients. Can you offer them a better experience than your competitor by working with a homcare provider?

Can you offer them a different standard of phone-based support, more choice on delivery options, for example, collection via a local pharmacy so they don’t have to wait in for a delivery, or delivery to different locations even if the product has to be refrigerated by the use of cost-efficient temperature controlled packaging.

In this current climate the NHS is looking for added value from all quarters, and a well developed service offering that provides something that supports the clinical team and the patients will help your brand to stand out from others.

2. ACHIEVE HIGHER RATES OF COMPLIANCE AND ADHERENCE
Most homecare companies have trained nurse advisers, pharmacists and patient management services available. They can, for instance, provide help managing early treatment side effects and support the patient through this early phase in treatment. This support can help improve adherence as well as ensuring patients can be referred back to the clinic where necessary. With specialist advisers on hand to provide support and proper encouragement, the patient is more likely to carry on taking their therapy instead of failing at the first hurdle.

Patient retention has been shown to be higher because they can ask for advice about their medication and have any side effects explained to them. This results in the patient being reassured and less likely to stop taking their medication. In addition, homecare companies are starting to use technology to improve patient compliance, such as sending text messages to patients to remind them when to take their drugs; this is equally important when they are not taken every day and for multiple daily doses.

3. SUPPORT FOR PATIENTS MEANS IMPROVED TREATMENT OUTCOMES
Many patients who currently receive homecare have chronic conditions and therefore could be taking medication for a long time. They will require different degrees of support as their treatment progresses; so a good homecare package will be designed to ensure their needs are met. This includes support at any stage of treatment — providing the right advice and information; training them on how to take their medicines; knowing when to refer them back to their clinic; giving advice on how to take their medication abroad and on relevant documentation they may need – which of course enhances the efficiency of your product and the reputation of your brand.

By supporting patients, ensuring that there are no gaps in therapy and ensuring that they are managed properly, homecare provides optimal treatment which then can help improve outcomes for the patient, reducing the need for hospitalisation.

While clinical outcomes data to support homecare over other patient management methods is not extensive, there are some good indicators of its benefits, as illustrated at the 41st Annual Meeting of the European Society for Paediatric Endocrinology in 2002.

“Growth Hormone (GH) homecare service was shown to improve compliance from 67 per cent to 89 per cent. Patients receiving GH at home achieved optimal therapy, as evidenced by their improved compliance and increased height velocity.”

Another more recent publication (Molassots et al 2009) has shown the benefits of a homecare nurse-supported programme over standard care in patients receiving oral chemotherapy. “A symptom-focused homecare programme was able to assist patients manage their treatment adverse effects more effectively than standard care.”

4. IMPROVE SALES AND MARKETING RETURNS
Brand teams spend a lot of time and effort developing strategies to maximise return on investment on their products (which is considerable before it reaches the market). This effort is mirrored by the sales teams who implement these strategies.

New patients are seen as the key to sales growth. However, much of this hard work can be wasted if patients who start therapy stop early, perhaps due to early side effects that would diminish after a short time on the therapy, missing out on the clinical benefits that could have been realised had they continued just that bit longer.

In many cases emphasis is placed on acquiring new patients, and current patients can be overlooked. A good homecare-driven support programme utilising trained nurses can often help patients through the first period of treatment. Hence, by looking at clinical homecare not just as a supply route but as part of the whole support package for the brand, overall sales per patient can be potentially improved. As an example, in one therapy area the service...
design provided by different homecare providers for the same brand produced an annual drop-off rate range from <5% to >20%, highlighting the influence that the right service design can have on potential returns.

In the previously quoted Growth Hormone study, not only were there patient out-come benefits. "From a commercial perspective improved compliance resulted in an approximate 40 per cent increase in drug spend."

When it comes to patient care, price shouldn’t be your main consideration – look at the levels of service, shop around because spending that little bit more could help with patient retention.

5. STRENGTHEN THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN MANUFACTURER AND BRAND IN THE MIND OF PATIENTS

As already mentioned, homecare companies can tailor the service supporting your products, for instance the service can have its own identity with materials that reflect your brand colours and values. This means patients closely associate the brand with the manufacturer – and can help differentiate your brand and service from another in the market.

Homecare companies can build your service to provide the patient with delivery options, collection from a specified pharmacy chain, management by therapy-trained nurses or customer service coordinators and access to helplines, all of which add value to, and encourage patients to stay with your brand.

6. GAIN INCREASED PRODUCT MARKET ACCESS

Homecare companies have intimate knowledge of how the NHS works – from launching a product via, for example, Patient Access Schemes, through to ensuring and facilitating good communications between all stakeholders once the product is established.

Pharma companies are developing more specialty brands, which by their nature are high value and originate in secondary care, either because of the disease area (eg, oncology), or molecules (eg, biologics). Two key requirements here are the use of Patient Access Schemes and careful stock management. Homecare companies are ideally placed to support the NHS and pharma companies in managing the various Patient Access Schemes in the market.

Additionally the homecare provider can offer nationwide distribution of relatively low volumes of high-value products to patients and hospitals, thus negating the need for utilising multi-site wholesalers. Homecare is able to achieve significant cost savings for the NHS. The use of a homecare provider to supply directly to patients can achieve important savings in pharmacy costs (stocks, dispensing time and resource).

There are more savings to be made by providing IV injections and infusions in the home environment, again by freeing up NHS resource to be used more efficiently - both clinic time and bed space. Homecare providers will have in place all the required quality and governance procedures to deliver these services safely via highly trained and qualified Nurses.

Thanks to the cost savings being provided to the health service, homecare companies have the potential to work with the pharmaceutical industry and help develop solutions that may enable new therapy areas to be developed for homecare. As and when the new value-based pricing model comes into force homecare companies will be able to offer even greater support in this respect.
7. ADD VALUE TO YOUR BRAND
Homecare companies can help you provide patients with support programmes even when primary care is responsible for managing the patients under shared care protocols. This could be as simple as the provision of specific consumable kits and syringes, clinical waste collection, or follow up by a nurse to ensure that the patient knows how to administer your product and help maximise compliance and the level of successful outcomes – all of which adds value to your brand.

8. ACCESS INCREASED DATA TO HELP SUPPORT YOUR BRAND
In addition to sales distribution, homecare companies capture treatment data. What dose are patients taking? When did they stop treatment? Why did they stop? They can provide compliance data to help marketers understand their patient base, including the age and gender of patients which you could have access to.

Most companies will be willing to provide tailored reports that help provide real insight into how your product is used.

9. REDUCED MEDICINES WASTAGE
It is well documented that patient adherence to medicines can be very low, the greater the daily frequency the worse the compliance – we have all heard the stories about medicine cabinets filled with unused drugs obtained on regular repeats. This is an obvious waste of NHS funds, but it can also reflect on the perceived efficacy of your brand if the patient is “not responding to therapy”.

Homecare providers can monitor drug usage and ensure treatments are only delivered as per patient supply and need – this reduces wastage levels. Costs to the NHS and lack of compliance can be flagged to a clinical team, which can in turn have an effect on the perceived efficacy of the brand.

10. BENEFIT FROM CONTROLLED DISTRIBUTION
With homecare, you secure the supply chain - you know where your products are going. There is virtually no chance of leakage or counterfeit drugs entering into the supply chain. Homecare companies only provide UK branded packs for UK patients so this ensures complete visibility of input and output for pharma companies.

You can also obtain accurate sales and distribution data. Homecare companies know their prescriber, patient, specialist centre and delivery addresses, and can provide you with accurate information for representative recognition. They can also provide you with accurate product sales because all your products are delivered directly to the patient.

In general, whether the delivery is made via a courier, post or van, homecare firms can service patients across the UK with a quick, secure and reliable offering that is batch traceable to the patient.

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