10 ways to maximise the benefits of home healthcare

A practical guide by Ambi Singh

It’s not just the gratification of delivering immediate and lasting quality of life gains that makes progressive homecare services so valued now. Even beyond the unique opportunities to communicate with people in their own homes, ensuring that compliance with vital (often costly) treatment regimens is rigorously upheld, there are myriad benefits for pharma companies.

The truth is that a well-managed homecare service now plays a key role in pharmaceutical marketing, as a gainful intermediary between manufacturer, prescriber and end-user. It provides credible, legitimate channels for direct-to-patient branding, absolute security of supply chain and rapid, convenient data crunching. As a result, the UK homecare market has exploded in the past three years (estimated to be approaching £1bn), also in line with government objectives to push healthcare out into communities (and homes), plus demands from our ageing population.

The value added now stretches far beyond the old ‘glorified logistics’ days. With some collaboration, a savvy homecare partner will noticeably enhance your marketing power.
1. BECOME FAMILIAR WITH TODAY’S OFFERING

Essentially, homecare services are all about improving the quality of life of patients whose illness or condition compromises their ability to travel regularly to and from hospitals, GP surgeries or other specialist treatment centres. Yet, homecare is now much more than simply providing the door-to-door delivery of medicines.

A team of specialist healthcare professionals, including nurses and pharmacists, can work seven days a week to ensure that patients (often on very high-value treatment regimens) receive appropriate information and support when taking their medicines. They also encourage and monitor compliance, provide therapy training and essentially prevent needless hospital admission by ensuring people are well controlled on their prescribed medication.

For pharma, homecare also offers a direct-to-patient communication and data feedback route. Current legislation prohibits direct marketing or direct access to patients; however through a targeted, bespoke homecare service, pharma companies can ethically and legally reach this endpoint. A face-to-face consultation with a trained nurse, undertaken at the convenience of the patient in their home, is a powerful means by which to convey guidance on using a product so that it is maximally effective – and hence, gives successful, sustained outcomes.

2. SECURE YOUR SUPPLY CHAIN

With today’s threat – and indeed reality – of counterfeit medicines and untraceable parallel imports flooding the UK’s healthcare markets, it is a vital added benefit of employing a homecare services provider that the supply route from manufacturer to patient is rendered totally secure, as well as fully transparent.

In recent years, we’ve seen several big names in pharma move to protect their supply chains through the use of a single distribution network, an eminently sensible line of defence given the harm unauthorised medicines bring to patients as well as businesses. Homecare provides an added layer of protection on top of this, as the wholesaler (typically where counterfeit and parallel import products enter a market) is removed entirely from the manufacturer-to-patient supply route, thereby enabling absolute security.

Guaranteeing the supply chain integrity in this way provides not only total peace of mind – for the patient as much as the manufacturer and healthcare professional – but also a practicable mechanism for dealing with recalls and so on.

Pharma firms commissioning homecare service support services directly from a provider are handed immediate control of the movement of their products, benefitting from a full knowledge of their whereabouts at all times. Nothing is tampered with, everything is original, thereby side-steps the issues surrounding parallel imports and the rising influx of counterfeit pharmaceuticals.

Companies may also commission homecare services indirectly (ie, via an NHS treatment centre); however, irrespective of how services are commissioned, extended credit arrangements and high-tech batch monitoring ensure unmitigated supply chain security and transparency for all parties.

Some therapy areas where homecare is gaining importance

- Multiple sclerosis
- HIV
- Haemophilia
- Enteral nutrition
- Renal anaemia
- Growth hormone deficiency
- Enzyme replacement therapy
- End stage renal failure
- Transplant rejection therapies
- IV antibiotics/antifungals
- IV immunoglobulins
- Oncology

3. MAXIMISE YOUR DTP BRANDING

In essence, what homecare offers the pharma industry is a direct-to-patient route. Of course, we understand (and respect) the ABPI’s prohibition of direct marketing or direct access by manufacturers to patients. However, even within these restrictions, the DTC branding activity that is permitted by homecare companies is where an astute provider can start to add significant value to your marketing endeavours.

A world of difference exists between a leaflet being laid out in a doctor’s surgery and a trusted, caring human being discussing the use of a specific product face-to-face with the patient. By homecare nurses discussing therapies directly with patients, pharmaceutical partners are afforded the unique opportunity to see their support literature put directly into the hands of the end user.

It is also permissible to go a step further, adding the pharmaco’s own branding to the homecare material. This means that the homecare company could, for example, be described officially as, ‘a homecare service provider of Pharmaceutical Company A’.

It is important that patients are clear about how homecare improves their quality of life, as well as relationships with their NHS treatment centre and the maker of their medicines. Therefore, this co-branding option can enhance the link between your company name and a service which is valued highly by chronically-ill patients, as well as overstretched NHS employees.

It is also possible to add manufacturer information to homecare therapy ‘Welcome Packs’, which may include direct contact details for named individuals or departments. For certain clinical queries, patients on the homecare system are then able to contact the pharmaceutical company directly for more information.

The credible and legitimate DTP branding and communication options offered by homecare are many and varied; hence, in order to achieve the best outcomes in ensuring correct usage and proper compliance of a product, pharma should try to bring the homecare provider into its marketing plans.
4. APPRECIATE THE PATIENT’S PERSPECTIVE

Consider the limitations imposed upon patients by chronic illnesses or conditions with several co-morbidities, sometimes rendering them completely housebound, and the rationale behind an efficient homecare service is clear.

Many patients can be required to visit their hospital or GP surgery once, twice or three times a week to receive treatment or medication. If they’re elderly or suffering from multiple conditions, simply getting to and from the hospital often requires exhausted relatives having to take time off work, and to pay extortionate car parking fees, etc, while leaving the comfort of their home and security of their neighbourhood is a genuine mountain to climb.

Clinical waste also needs to be managed and handling multiple repeat prescriptions can easily overwhelm people, resulting in poor compliance, interrupted treatment and a consequent (and expensive) trip to hospital when symptoms flare up.

For the patient, therefore, a good homecare service brings immediate advantages, saving time and money and – above all else – enabling them to lead a more normal life.

Helping people to understand how their homecare service (in partnership with its pharmaceutical or health service associates) is able to make life easier results in greater trust and stronger relationships all round.

Stable, well-controlled patients also make for a happier NHS, which frankly should take all the help it can get when dealing with the ongoing administration and management of complex prescribing regimens.

Through homecare, pharma is perceived clearly to be a part of the solution.

5. EMPATHISE WITH THE NHS

Speaking of which, we are frequently reminded that the NHS is under notable strain. In line with the new commissioning objectives starting to come into play, the health service more than ever needs its partners in the pharma industry to provide value-added packages that offer tangible healthcare solutions far beyond product supply and sale.

This need will only continue to augment as the government shifts significant chunks of healthcare service provision out into communities and patients’ homes, as part of a drive to improve quality of life, choice and efficiency in its service delivery.

In the 2006 White Paper, Our health, Our Care, Our Say: A New Direction for Community Services, the requirement and benefits of ‘support that reaches out into communities and homes’ was acknowledged by the Secretary of State for Health. “By looking at people’s whole lives, not individual problems, and fitting services around their needs, we will help them live healthier, more independent lives,” the paper states.

An efficient, convenient home-based pharmaceutical support service is a major attraction for the NHS, in terms of relieving pressure on scant existing resources and maximising the clinical benefit of specialist care provision. With pharma and homecare looking after patients directly, or even in collaboration with Trusts, clinical centres can free up time and labour, immediately redeploying resources and adding greater value when they do see patients.

The NHS cash flow is also improved with the homecare provider buying medicines direct from the manufacturer. This relieves some of the stock and insurance burdens on the healthcare service, helping further to release funds and take the strain; as a true and valued partner in healthcare should.

6. DEMAND ALL THE BELLS AND WHISTLES

Remember that the principle raisons d’être of a homecare service provider are to improve patients’ quality of life, and tangibly to boost the value and efficiency of pharmaceutical and NHS treatment programmes. We are here to take away all the headaches of treating patients at home.

With this in mind, therefore, you should take time to ensure that any homecare provider is bending over backwards to deliver a reliable, flexible and bespoke service for your products and patients.

You should feel confident that you’re dealing with experts who will deliver on their promises, so that you can rest assured that no patient will ever be left without their medication and that all of your product is accounted for – 100 per cent of the time.

It wasn’t so long ago that ’homecare’ in the UK was (unofficially at least) synonymous with nothing more than ’glorified logistics’ – moving boxes of medicines around in vans and delivering pre-sealed ‘stuff’. Yet, today’s business is a far cry from this, having blossomed into a wealth of service options designed to make patient’s lives easier and specialised treatment programmes better. Because of this, pharma should rightly expect a good homecare provider to not only deliver the stuff on time and securely but have a hand in educating the patient, supporting and complementing the advice given by the prescriber and manufacturer, ensuring a clear understanding of how and when to use a product, how and where to store it, and finally, how to dispose of clinical waste, etc.

A reputable homecare provider should have safe and secure systems in place. Peace of mind for pharma and quality of life for patients is what a first-class homecare service is all about.

7. FIND A USER-FRIENDLY HOMECARE SERVICE

Two of the biggest homecare challenges for the NHS are managing prescriptions (ie, ensuring timeliness and avoiding duplications), and matching invoices with deliveries (and generally keeping on top of an intensifying administrative load). For pharma, time can be wasted chasing data from their homecare provider, waiting for reports and feedback. It is vital that your homecare company not only recognises these issues but is totally
up to date in terms of its IT solutions. There should be an early warning system regarding prescription renewal and management, which additionally gives pharma instant access to its data, along with the ability to create and send reports at the mere click of a button. Comprehensive and free access to all data should be part of the contract.

If there’s a recall, products can be picked up and replaced safely and quickly, vastly reducing the impact on the patient. You have complete control. Compare that to the wholesaler model: no batch traceability, no end-point transparency, no instant visibility and you pay to get your data back (often via expensive intelligence companies). In selecting your homecare provider, demand that they are at the cutting-edge of customer service.

8. PROTECT YOUR PRODUCT’S PLACE
A significant benefit of employing a homecare provider to manage the delivery and use of medicines directly is the leverage afforded in ensuring that they remain front of house, so to speak. While our nurses and pharmacists clearly cannot recommend one product over another, they are perfectly positioned to endorse the correct storage, handling, administration and disposal of your product.

As any sales rep worth their salt will tell you, vigilance in monitoring and continual support is key in reducing the risk of the health service switching therapies or withdrawing the treatment entirely. If there is poor compliance, the homecare provider can alert the NHS health centre and, in accordance with clear service-led agreements with hospitals, PCTs or drug companies, take a formalised line of enquiry with the patient, to identify and rectify any problems quickly.

Fully informed of the issues, the NHS will then also speak to the patient to reinforce the clinical messages, ensuring continued use of the product, appropriately and effectively, into the future. This is about optimising the patient’s regime. Without this observation and feedback from the homecare provider, the bottom line is interrupted therapy for the patient (possibly putting them in hospital), time and costs for the NHS in re-evaluating and even switching drugs plus, of course, lost sales for pharma.

9. UNDERSTAND HOW THE MARKET IS DEVELOPING
Currently, there are several different ‘models’ for homecare service commission/provision being trialled. Historically, government/NHS award of business would be one contract at a time for one hospital and one homecare service. However, there is a movement towards separating the product and the service (de-bundling), so that a whole ‘shopping basket’ of products (eg, HIV, MS or arthritis) can be

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10. MAXIMISE THE VALUE
Calls for convenient treatment in the community have made the government and the NHS acutely aware that homecare is increasingly the way forward. More and more high-value and blockbuster drugs lend themselves to home use (see Wyeth’s Enbrel and Abbott’s Humira for rheumatoid arthritis), and while pharma could expect a wholesaler to make a 10–12 per cent margin, this is comparable for a comprehensive homecare package.

In the hunt for a savvy and cost-effective homecare provider, ensure that your ultimate choice not only provides great DTP branding and communication channels, but gives you total supply chain security as well as transparency in stock control and support for your product’s place in the market. Involve the homecare firm in your marketing plans and you’ll reap the rewards.

Find the right supplier and you will get all the marketing ‘bells and whistles’ without the premium price tag.

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