Using Drug Company Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs)

In an effort to make medications available to those in need, many pharmaceutical companies provide free medications to individuals with low incomes who have no prescription drug coverage. These donated medications are provided through pharmaceutical company Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs). Medications available through PAPs are usually brand-name medications and all require an application, eligibility documentation, and a physician's order or prescription.

Prior to setting up a Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs):

The clinic must decide whether or not it will assist patients in obtaining medications that are either not listed on the approved formulary or that have been consciously excluded from the formulary because the medication does not reflect the philosophy and mission of the clinic or meet its guiding principles. This is a critical step in any medication access program and should not be overlooked.

If the organization determines that assistance with the PAPs application should not be provided:

Clinic personnel may supply the patient with information as to how to access the medication either through Patient Assistance Programs independently or through other community resources.

In order to receive free medication through a PAPs, an individual must be determined eligible by the donating company. Although each pharmaceutical company has its own specific eligibility criteria, generally all programs base eligibility on the individual's residency, income, and insurance status.

Basic Rules and Regulations

All pharmaceutical company PAPs programs require an application completed and signed by the patient. The majority of companies require the prescribing physician's signature, and some may require the signature of a patient advocate or social worker. All require documentation supporting patient eligibility, and an original physician prescription or medication order. These applications must be mailed into the sponsoring pharmaceutical company, although some companies may initiate the application process online or with a telephone call to their call center, followed by the paper application process.

Similar to running an On-Site Pharmacy, a successful and efficient PAP program requires:

1) Physical resources

- Dedicated space
  - The dedicated space needs to be accessible to patients and healthcare providers in order to facilitate the program information and referral process
- Equipment and supplies
  - Electronic and data capabilities
  - Computer with internet access for the Patient Assistance Program staff person
  - Fax machine
  - Copy machine
  - Telephone

2) Staffing resources

If possible, staffing should be based on the anticipated number of patients to be served.

The program would be best managed by a dedicated staff person or persons who will need to:

- Research available medication access options and PAP program requirements. Available on-line resources include:
  - Needy Meds
  - Rx Assist
  - PPARx
- Coordinate with clinic enrollment staff to obtain eligibility verifications required for the PAPs application
- Assist patients in completing the application
- Obtain all required signatures including the referring physician's signature
- Obtain the original prescription or medication order
- Process the individual applications according to pharmaceutical company requirements

- Track the application process from mailing, to approval/denial process, to product shipment
- Receive the donated product
- Follow-up with the patient
    - For all donated product received
    - To appeal application denials
    - To provide the patient with information as to how to access the medication through other community resources
- Dispense donated product to the prescribed patient
- Monitor and track medication refill processes and application renewals
    - Clinics are encouraged to use both paid and volunteer personnel to meet staffing needs.

Information Technology Resources:

- Although your PAPs program could be administered and maintained using a manual record keeping and tracking process, it would operate more efficiently, cost-effectively, and accurately as well as have the ability to serve more patients by using a PAPs software program. There are many supportive PAPs programs available for licensure or purchase. Each software program meets the basic PAP application and tracking processes and many have added benefits to streamline and maximize the operation of your medication access program.

Some of the more widely used programs are available through:

- Patient Assistance Program Rx
- PDA USA
- RxAssist Plus
- RxHope
- MedData Services
- Financial Resources
    - In addition to traditional overhead costs, there will be costs associated with supplies, equipment, and information technology needs, if any.
- Operational Resources

- It is essential to develop a written Standard Operating or Policies and Procedures manual to guide your PAP application processes. This is a critical component of any successful PAP program. The manual should include procedures for administering the PAP application process, record keeping and follow-up actions, receiving, storing, and dispensing PAP medication, and returning or disposing of PAP medication not dispensed or delivered to the identified patient. A Policy and Procedures manual, along with on-going training and monitoring, ensures a consistent and proficient medication access program through any subsequent staff turnover or increases in patient load.

Although the majority of pharmaceutical companies' Patient Assistance Programs are for brand named medications only, there are PAPs for generic medications, which offer patient assistance programs for generic medications.

- Rx Outreach
- Xubex Pharmaceutical Services

These companies purchase generic medications in bulk supply and dispense them for a small fee to individuals with low incomes who have no prescription drug coverage.

Reason

Is all this worth the effort? Absolutely! When a patient has been diagnosed with a disease or condition requiring medication therapy, the healthcare provider wants his or her patient to have access to certain prescribed medications that are clinically appropriate for the indicated diagnosis and treatment plan. Given the high cost of medications and the at-risk population your clinic serves, if done properly, the value of medications received and positive impact on patient health outcomes far exceeds the actual expense of operating a Patient Assistance Program.

Administrators of the clinic's pharmaceutical assistant program should stay engaged with industry trends (political and otherwise) so that the clinic might serve the most patients in need.