Pharmacies are increasingly becoming destinations for convenient healthcare with wellness events, immunizations, screenings, and on-site clinics. If pharma marketers think of the “retail pharmacy” as just a place where drugs are dispensed, they may be overlooking an opportunity to gain access to a significant audience of current and prospective patients.

By Jim O’Dea

The pharmacy is more than a place where pharmacists dispense drugs and consumers purchase necessities. Since nearly 93% of Americans live within five miles of a pharmacy, pharmacies are considered a convenient and accessible resource for health and daily living needs such as over-the-counter (OTC) medicines.¹ As such, by offering a broad array of health and wellness services, increasingly consumers view retail pharmacies as a critical component of the healthcare delivery system. As pharmaceutical manufacturers look for ways to deliver their messages to a relevant audience, the retail pharmacy is a channel that should not be overlooked.

Today’s pharmacies are revamping their business models to participate more in healthcare delivery. Prescription services such as online refill, automatic refill and reminder programs are on the cutting edge of patient-friendly technology. In addition, pharmacists are involved more in patient care with the increasing availability of onsite immunizations and vaccinations, wellness events and disease screenings. In fact, between 2007 and 2011, the number of pharmacists trained to deliver vaccines increased from 40,000 to 150,000.² Also, many pharmacies offer on-site clinics where they provide a variety of healthcare services to pharmacy patients. With the focus on delivering more than just prescriptions, pharmacies are becoming known as wellness centers instead of merely retail outlets.

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Pharmacies are fast-evolving into convenient points of care through which patients are provided with the information needed to make informed decisions about medications and tools to stay on therapy. “People are taking a more active role in their health and for the kind of life they want to live. We [at Walgreens] continue to transform the role of community pharmacy and we offer unparalleled access to health and wellness services in our communities to help more people get, stay and live well. To help meet the need for greater access to affordable health services and bridge gaps in patient care, while also improving care coordination, we recently announced a significant service expansion at the Take Care Clinics located at select Walgreens. The new services, now available at more than 330 Take Care Clinics, include assessment, treatment and
management for chronic conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol, asthma and others, as well as additional preventive health services,” said Nagawa Kakumba, Director, Biopharmaceutical Development Marketing, Walgreens. “With greater access of healthcare professionals (pharmacists and nurses), pharmacies are becoming a means to truly connect with patients.”

**Advantages of using the pharmacy as a channel**

Over the years, pharmacists have become trusted advisors for consumers’ healthcare questions, concerns and issues, and not only for those related to prescriptions. In fact, when asked how they would rate the honesty and ethical standards of pharmacists, 75% of respondents said either “very high” or “high”, according to recent a Gallup Poll report.³

Additionally, approximately 81% of adults are using OTC products, typically purchased at pharmacies, as a first response to both acute and chronic conditions.⁴ Patients stroll the pharmacy aisles looking for the appropriate OTC medicine to treat the condition; however, some of these issues may require further intervention via a prescribed medication. Because they currently are thinking about this particular problem, these patients are an important audience for messages and education about prescription alternatives.

Moreover, pharmacies can be viewed as a media channel by advertisers and brand marketers. A “channel” in media lexicon is defined as a specific medium used in reaching an intended audience and through which news, information, entertainment, education, data and/or promotional messages are disseminated. Based on that definition, the pharmacy certainly qualifies as a channel. Through it, key patient-directed objectives can be accomplished, including:

- **Patient acquisition**
- **Education**
- **Adherence**

In 2011, 4.02 billion prescriptions were dispensed.⁵ Over 85% of these prescriptions were filled at chain, independent, supermarket and mass merchandiser pharmacies.⁶ Mature consumers are contributing exponentially to these numbers. Nearly half of all Americans age 55 and older are taking a prescription drug versus 23% of those in the 18–24 age group.⁷ In many cases, patients see their pharmacists more often than they see their physicians.

There are an estimated 250 million customers visiting pharmacies weekly.⁸ This phenomenon makes pharmaceutical marketing campaigns incredibly cost–effective due to the sheer volume of potential patients reached. “One of the main advantages is accessibility and the opportunity to interact with patients at the point of care. Trying to reach patients is a big challenge, especially in a cost–effective, targeted way. We have the ability to deliver impactful and targeted multi–channel marketing campaigns and we can leverage and support our providers in more engaging patient education approaches as well,” said Ms. Kakumba.

"With greater access to healthcare professionals (pharmacists and nurses), pharmacies are becoming a means to truly connect with patients," explained Walgreens’ Nagawa Kakumba.

AstraZeneca has conducted numerous marketing campaigns in retail pharmacies. “At AstraZeneca, we’ve used many different types of tactics. When focusing within retail we have traditionally looked to classify tactics into several buckets: (1) adherence programs; (2) consumer information programs; and (3) patient access programs. The brand’s lifecycle will generally dictate the direction that these programs will take,” said Bruce Wilson, Organized Customer Group Director, Design for Launch, Oncology and Business Development, AstraZeneca. In this way, pharmacies present a unique opportunity for creating awareness about pharmaceutical and healthcare products.

**Pharmacy marketing**

There are a variety of methods and targeting tools available to reach patients through pharmacy specific advertising. Some of the most common include:

1. **Shelf dispensers.** Brands target specific space in the area of the pharmacy—health and personal care aisles, pharmacy counter—based on where they can reach the largest audience of potential patients. For example, a brand that treats chronic dry eye may use a shelf dispenser placed near OTC eye drops in order to gain a prospective patient’s attention. The dispenser contains information about the medical problem and available solutions. “Shelf–talker programs have been beneficial from the perspective of being able to create awareness
Pharmacy channel: marketing methods and targeting tools

- **Shelf dispensers** delivered in the aisles and targeted sections
- **Specialty health newsletters and magazines** delivered in prescription pick-up areas
- **Video** signage
- **Point-of-sale delivered** with prescriptions
- **Retailer-sponsored** screening and wellness events

with patients of alternate therapies that may be right for them. The shelf–talker, when placed appropriately, enables the patient to have a more informed/educated discussion with his/her doctor,” said Mr. Wilson.

2. **Prescription bags.** Brand messaging and information can be delivered with the bag or stapled to it.

3. **Specialty health newsletters or magazines.** These typically are available at prescription pick-up areas and are focused on either a specific disease state or general healthcare topics.

4. **Digital screens.** These digital displays can show brand messages to patients waiting for their prescriptions. Nearby patient brochure racks can provide trial offers, promotional items or additional information about a brand or health condition.

5. **Retailer-sponsored screenings and wellness events.** These events can target one or several chronic health conditions and are particularly well-suited for raising disease awareness. They also generate increased foot traffic for the pharmacy, resulting in more potential patient exposure to other in store brand marketing.

Ms. Kakumba has seen effective implementation of these and other advertising mechanisms in place at Walgreens. As well, Walgreens is a leader in consumer engagement through online and mobile channels. “We continue to innovate and expand upon the types of marketing and clinical patient services we leverage in order affect positive patient behavior. As we evolve, we continue partnering with manufacturers to offer new and different types of solutions that meet unique brand objectives while maximizing the patient experience. Our approach is strategic and customer centered. And, we are able to tap into unique customer insights that help maximize the impact of our efforts,” said Ms. Kakumba.

**Leveraging pharmacies to understand patients**

Most awareness initiatives involve offering broad-based information designed to help patients identify symptoms and gain an understanding of their conditions. Pharmacy settings are particularly conducive to these types of campaigns because, in an average week at one chain drug pharmacy, over 3,000 transactions take place and 1,621 prescriptions are dispensed.9 That number amounts to thousands of opportunities weekly to create and build lasting relationships with patients that extend beyond the pharmacy walls. “Pharmacy, like print, provides a targeted approach to messaging. The consumer that is in the pharmacy has a medical situation that they are looking to treat. This is the consumer that is most likely and willing to take action. When everything is looked at equally, the pharmacy can be one of the most effective channels to reach consumers,” said Mr. Wilson. Additionally, the retail pharmacy lends itself well to quantitative measurement techniques to determine program results and to calculate the return on investment of marketing efforts. From information-gathering at the pharmacy counter to reading signage throughout the retail space, marketers have the opportunity to reach patients in the pre–diagnosis phase, at initial treatment and throughout usage. DTC

**Jim O’Dea** is the President and Chief Executive Officer with Rx EDGE Pharmacy Networks. Located in East Dundee, Illinois, Rx EDGE Pharmacy Networks assists pharmaceutical brands in acquiring new patients, increasing product awareness and keeping their current patients adherent through programs delivered in the retail pharmacy channel. Rx EDGE Pharmacy Networks is a business unit of LeveragePoint Media, a leading provider of in-store media solutions. For more information please call Kathleen Bonetti at 847-879-6036, email Kathleen.bonetti@rx-edge.com or visit www.rx-edge.com.

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