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digital health

Integrating Digital Health Technologies Into Patient Support Programs

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Over the last 15 years, the life science industry launched Patient Support Programs (PSPs) to support patients in accessing complex medications and propose a more integrated approach to all health players including patients, care teams, and healthcare professionals. According to Gangjuli A., Clewell J., and Shillington A., PSPs are "*enhanced self-management support programs that include interventions such as individualized medication counseling, training, support, and virtual reminders to improve medication-taking behavior.*"

Patient support programs were created to help patients navigate the healthcare system from clinic support to patient education, risk management, logistics services, reimbursement frameworks and social support services. According to a report from Beyond Intervention commissioned by Abbott released in 2020, 72% of patients interviewed said that they "*wished for more personalized care that is tailored to their unique disease and condition*". New tools or programs must be designed and integrated into the health care practice to allow for regular monitoring of the patient, and consequently, a more individualized experience.

Published in 2014, the objectives of Patient Support Programs are still relevant:

- Fill gaps in care systems that do not allow for a comprehensive service offering,
- Help patients navigate through these services,
- Optimize health outcomes and the value of care.

As underlying objectives, we can mention:

- Helping patients better manage their disease and complex medication treatments,
- Improving treatment adherence,
- Reducing complications and costs.

Some clinical evaluations have demonstrated the interest and impact of PSPs. One of them includes 2,386 patients treated with adalimumab (ADA), and 1,199 of them were allocated to a PSP. Drug adherence was 14% greater in the PSP cohort and the discontinuation rate was 14% lower for the same group. A second study demonstrated that treatment adherence was 29.3% higher and the discontinuation rate 22% lower for the 1,134 patients that were included in a PSP on a total of 2,268 patients treated with ADA. Both studies demonstrated that PSPs could influence treatment adherence.

Patient Support Programs Objectives

Integrating Digital Health Technologies into Patient Support Programs

While PSPs continually evolved in recent years by leveraging digital technologies to deliver content and education, they are somewhat limited in providing personalized and continuous support. Their implementation can be very costly and there is no guarantee of a higher patient empowerment.

Enhancing patient experience for better health outcomes

New therapies, such as specialty treatments for cancer or rare diseases, request better support and a more tailored approach. With cancer, for example, each experience is unique, depending on the size and stage of the tumor, its location in the body, and the line of therapy and treatment dosage required. Therefore, a tailored care plan is necessary to ensure treatment and care are consistent with the patient's needs, especially when treatment-related symptoms and the quality of life can be severely impacted.

To tailor the patient experience, education is key. Giving patients the right and most relevant information to help them better understand their disease and how to manage it, has the potential to increase their level of engagement. Education is the first step, but it is not enough. Empowerment is critical to delivering a truly personalized experience. Increasing empowerment can be achieved by developing digital technologies to access patient data, which has become essential to personalized medicine.

Better communication between patients and their care team is also needed for patient data sharing and quality mprovement. Maintaining a link with their care team allows patients to share information as much as possible about their experience. Helping patients better manage their health conditions can often be achieved if patients feel empowered in their healthcare decisions.

Defining an agreed data-sharing process between patients and their care team is important. Digital health solutions have the potential to maintain this constant link and to make data access easier. In addition to the 24/7 phone support provided by the PSP, with digital health technologies patients can enter their data directly into the app or send information via a connected device to their doctor's electronic health record (EHR). It becomes possible to check at any time the health status or to trigger a change in the patient's treatment plan. With regular interaction and high-quality data, more patients can act on their disease and the care team has enough detailed information in hand to decide on a shift of treatment plan.

A new personalized treatment experience within PSPs

Over the past decade, the life science industry has experienced the full force of digital transformation and must now improve the real-world impact of drugs. Life science companies are looking at new investment opportunities to deliver differentiating treatment experiences and to extend the lifespan of their drug assets. Moreover, purchasing models are evolving as payers expect real-world safety and efficacy to grant market access to novel medications. That is the reason why more pharma companies partner with digital health companies to develop a digital app for their drug asset.
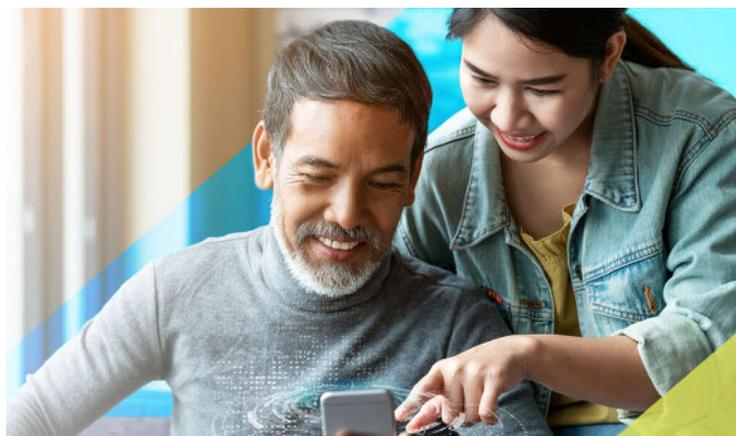
As digital health solutions reach the market and try to make their way into the healthcare system towards patients and practitioners, an emerging strategy is to integrate digital health solutions' data within a PSP. A once low-tech, human-driven approach can then become a data-enriched marriage of clinically validated interventions, automated triggers, and more informed human interactions. Integrated within a PSP, digital health technologies enable a more personalized treatment experience through:

- **Convenience**: A digital solution is easily accessible anywhere and at any time.
- **Remote Monitoring**: Patient-entered data used for constant remote monitoring of their health status.

- **Exchanges**: A near real-time bi-directional exchange of information between care teams and patients.
- **Medical Support**: Medical directions for patients on what to do and when, so that they are always supported, especially when a symptom arises.
- **Continuous link**: A regular follow-up of the patients' health situation, enabling prompt intervention in the treatment plan and anticipating complications.

To effectively execute such a strategy, it is essential to integrate the digital asset with the PSP in terms of branding and workflow. This will contribute to optimized patient treatment adherence by combining a digital solution with a set of services that offer navigation support in the care system.

Data-wise, combining digital health with PSPs is a great opportunity. Data collection, which is a gold mine for healthcare teams, would not be possible without a digital app that is easy to use, to understand, and directly available in patients' hands. A high part of digital health solutions adoption is based on its user experience and the added value it can bring. Data collection aims to improve the interaction between the patient and their care team, thanks to a shared decision process. The patient feels supported and a relationship of trust can be built with the healthcare provider.

Furthermore, providing a digital health solution that combines self-management with remote monitoring can reduce the stress experienced by the patient and lead to:

- Less travel to the care center,
- More interaction (or dialogue) with the care team, built on a common knowledge base,
- Higher autonomy, as some medical interventions can be managed at home, by the patient,
- 24/7 support that can explain and reassure some uncertainties the patient may have,
- Feeling supported by a care team that can monitor the patient at any time.

Conclusion

Patient Support Programs and digital health could be offered in tandem under a unified branding to optimize the treatment experience as "Digital patient support programs". The PSP would support new patients in navigating the care system and the digital asset would provide real-time information about the condition, a permanent contact with the care team, in addition to tailored educational content. Combining digital health technologies and PSP can have a positive impact on the treatment experience since the collected data can help to adjust the treatment when needed. They represent an opportunity to empower patients by providing them with adapted and user-friendly services.

About Aptar Digital Health

Aptar Digital Health is a leader in integrated health solutions and services with a mission to elevate patient experiences at every stage of their treatment journey. Our suite of end-to-end, patient-centric digital solutions leverages our unmatched expertise and diverse, industry-leading product portfolio to deliver differentiating experiences and more positive outcomes.

Aptar Digital Health is a division of Aptar Pharma, which is part of AptarGroup, Inc., a global leader in drug and consumer product dosing, dispensing and protection technologies.

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