

## The Association of Community Cancer Center's Dispensing Pharmacy:

### An Option for Private Practices

**ACCC** surveys show that many practice members seek to better understand the issues associated with opening a dispensing pharmacy within a practice. As more oral anti-cancer drugs come into widespread use, will opening a dispensing pharmacy in an oncology practice enhance patient quality of care? What metrics can be used to determine whether or not to implement a dispensing pharmacy in a practice? ACCC seeks to answer these questions and provide insight into the decision-making process and challenges involved in setting up a dispensing pharmacy with its educational program, *Dispensing Pharmacy: An Option for Private Practices*.

#### Program Objectives

- Describe components of a dispensing pharmacy and provide information about new oral and IV anti-cancer drugs
- Develop metrics that practices can use to determine whether a dispensing pharmacy is in the best interest of their particular practice and patients
- Provide tools to measure whether patient care is enhanced by having a dispensing pharmacy in the practice.

#### Program Components

ACCC has appointed an expert advisory panel to guide this project in collaboration with a leading healthcare consulting company. The program will identify both practices with successful dispensing pharmacies and practices that have chosen not to establish a dispensing pharmacy. A discussion guide will be developed to assess the decision-making process and "best practices" in establishing a dispensing pharmacy. Results will be analyzed.

#### Program Deliverables

- Live and archived webinar

- Online resource center on ACCC's website, [www.accc-cancer.org](http://www.accc-cancer.org)
- Presentation of results at ACCC's two national meetings
- Publication of results in ACCC's journal, *Oncology Issues*.

#### Challenges to Adding a Dispensing Pharmacy

Among the challenges practices face when looking to dispense medications are ones related to space, staffing needs, patient volume and needs, payer mix, and the expense of oral agents.

**Space.** Many practices simply do not have the space to expand their footprint. And to truly be successful, oncology practices will likely have to stock a full range of agents.

**Staffing.** Practices may not have the resources to staff a pharmacy.

**Patient volume.** Practices that are looking into adding a dispensing pharmacy must first do a careful analysis and identify how many patients they are likely to dispense medications to, taking into account patient volume, payer mix, and drug pricing.

**Regulatory issues.** Requirements for dispensing biologicals vary by state. In addition, some payers may not reimburse for oral agents if a comparable IV agent exists. Generally oral agents are more expensive than medicines administered by IV.

#### Benefits to Adding a Dispensing Pharmacy

Adding a dispensing pharmacy has the potential to offer practices a number of benefits. And perhaps the single most important benefit is improving patient care.

**Improving patient adherence to medications.** While oral agents are more convenient for patients, they make it more challenging for physicians to monitor patient adherence to the treatment regimen. For example, patients might stop taking medications because of uncomfort-

able side effects. Or patients with significant co-payments may skip doses in an effort to save money. Practices that dispense medications can bring patients into the office more often to monitor for side effects and adherence. Instead of monthly prescriptions, practices could refill medications on a weekly basis, and that would ensure that patients return to the practice to meet with a nurse. This professional can ask important questions such as: *Are you taking your medicine? How do you feel? Are you experiencing any side effects from the medications?* All agents have toxicity, but asking the right questions and catching these side effects earlier improves patient care.

**Improving patient care and the patient experience.** As stated above, dispensing medications at your practice may help improve the quality of care you deliver. Dispensing at the point of care allows pharmacists to meet with patients face to face and offer education and support. Dispensing pharmacies can also be convenient for patients by offering a one-stop-shopping experience whereby patients do not have to make an extra trip to fill prescriptions.

#### Get Involved!

ACCC is actively looking to hear from practices that have chosen to establish a dispensing pharmacy, as well as practices that looked into adding a pharmacy and chose not to—for whatever reasons. Practices that are interested in participating in this innovative educational program should contact LuAnne Bankert, ACCC's Senior Director, Programs and Meetings, at: [Labankert@acc-cancer.org](mailto:Labankert@acc-cancer.org). 📧

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