Five Key Strategies to Improve Your Pharma Rep Education

In addition to providing the latest, most comprehensive information about drugs and technologies, pharma reps who visit your practice can share important updates about new drug regimens, protocols, labeling, indications, financial assistance programs, and clinical trials. Though many providers place moderate to severe access restrictions on visits from pharmaceutical reps, others who are challenged to keep up with new clinical advances amid increasing demands on their time find this education to be valuable—if done right. Here are five strategies to help improve the value of your pharma education.

1. Define Your Reps

The term *industry rep* is fairly nonspecific because it includes pharma and biotech reps, device reps, lab reps, and service reps. Within those categories are physicians working as medical science liaisons, nurses working as nurse educators, and others serving as reimbursement specialists or account executives. Every practice is unique; thus, to realize value from your pharma rep education, consider what strategic additions they can offer your team. Your practice's specific needs or questions should dictate which of these individuals have access to physicians and staff. To help in this effort, develop and maintain an accurate database of contact information, including each rep's full name, title, company, products, phone number, and email, to allow for instant access whenever a question or issue arises.

2. Create a Pharma Rep Policy

A defined, transparent policy communicates to reps what information is most important to your practice. The policy details what information is needed, when it is needed, and how frequently reps are able to meet with physicians and staff. It clearly outlines parameters, expectations, and limitations. An effective rep policy should contain the following elements:

- A description of why your providers and staff see pharma reps; for example, to learn about new indications and U.S. Food and Drug Administration-approved data or research or to learn about available and/or upcoming clinical trials.
- The specific type of reps your practice allows to visit; for example, nurse educators or reimbursement specialists.
- How reps can schedule appointments at your practice.
- Areas of the practice that are restricted to reps, such as exam rooms, nursing stations, waiting rooms, and labs.
- Whether the practice allows reps to bring food and, if so, information on food allergies, preferences, and spending restrictions per person.
- How and when reps can provide drug samples.
- Consequences for not following the rep policy.
- Restrictions on patient contact, such as prohibiting reps from observing or having direct contact with patients at all times.

3. Leverage Technology

Many practices cite administrative burden as one of the biggest barriers to effective pharma rep visits, yet tools exist that can help practices remove that barrier. For example, our online tool, RxVantage, allows practices to create meeting slots that reps self-schedule. The platform automatically enforces visitation policies, and your practice controls how often each type of rep may book appointments. Additionally, your physicians and staff can access a digital rep directory and instantly message the appropriate pharma rep whenever a question or concern arises. Leveraging this type of technology frees up front office staff to focus on patient-related tasks and will make rep visits to your practice more productive for your physicians and staff.

4. Incorporate Best Practices for Conducting Meetings

Proven methods from other industries can help practices increase both the productivity of pharma rep meetings and the quality of education. For example, require reps to submit topics in advance of meetings to ensure that your providers receive relevant education, supplemental materials, and research that is based on clinical studies and evidence-based medicine. With advance notice of the education your providers want or the challenges they face with a specific product, reps can gather and provide relevant, U.S. Food and Drug Administration-approved information up front instead of having to follow up on requests after the meeting. Designate someone to take notes, or even record the presentation, to help share the information across the organization.

5. Create a Feedback Loop

Time is an incredibly valuable resource, and pharma rep meetings are only as helpful as the education and information presented. As such, practices should track and record the usefulness of each rep visit. Review this feedback regularly to ensure that time is well spent and that reps are providing value. As appropriate, share feedback with reps to encourage collaboration. Communication is key in any relationship, so letting your pharma reps know what is and is not working will help establish a mutually beneficial relationship.

Mal Milburn is business development director-oncology at RxVantage, a free, cloud-based solution that connects healthcare providers with life science experts and resources, when they need them, to improve patient care.