

Are you getting the most from your pharmacy partner?

12 services behavioral health clinics should
expect from their integrated pharmacy

WHITE PAPER

Introduction

As never before, behavioral health providers face multifaceted and complex challenges to caring for their patients.

Mental illness and substance use disorder are on the rise amid the COVID-19 pandemic, driving demand for care. Yet at the same time, clinics are struggling to deal with staffing shortages and burnout at an unprecedented level. In addition, the dramatic shift to telehealth and hybrid care means many behavioral health clinics must adjust to a new work model with fewer on-site resources to support high-need patients.

Meanwhile, patients will inevitably feel the impact. Even before the pandemic, studies showed that up to 40 percent of people with mental illnesses did not receive or take medications as prescribed, a serious problem that can lead to worse health outcomes as well as increased emergency room visits and hospitalizations.

This guide outlines critical services an integrated pharmacy partner can provide mental health providers to bridge the gap in care, and help patient overcome barriers to medication adherence. The result? Improved care for patients, a lighter burden on clinical staff and increasing operational efficiency.

A strong integrated pharmacy partner can make a dramatic difference for your clinic and the people you serve.



12 ways integrated pharmacy can help your clinics

1. Expertise in behavioral health

Pharmacists with expertise in mental health and substance use disorder can significantly improve patient outcomes and reduce preventable hospital visits, according to studies. All Genoa Healthcare pharmacy staff are required to complete behavioral health courses, including Mental Health First Aid training to ensure they recognize the signs of someone dealing with a mental health crisis, and have the training to know how to respond.

In addition, all pharmacists working in a behavioral health setting must also complete psychiatric specialty training, and psychiatric pharmacists have the option of completing psychiatric board certification. We don't just keep our knowledge to ourselves – Genoa regularly shares our expertise with clinic partners via regular webinars and guides.

2. Build relationships with your patients and clinic teams

Genoa pharmacies develop close partnerships with providers and clinic staff, and trusting relationships with the patients they serve. Small, dedicated pharmacy teams learn their patients' names, understand their needs and help them overcome barriers to care. Patients are treated with compassion and respect, and receive personal touches such as birthday cards and annual gifts of calendars featuring artwork from Genoa's yearly consumer art contest.



FIGURE 3:
Artwork by Genoa Healthcare consumers from the
2021 Annual Art Contest

3. Help with prior authorizations and payment support

Issues with health insurance often become apparent when a patient goes to the pharmacy to pick up a medication. The medication may require prior authorization, or the patient may not be able to afford a medication. Integrated pharmacists can help with prior authorization, or if needed consult a physician to find an alternative medication.

Pharmaceutical companies offer patient assistance programs to provide free brand name medications for qualified patients who apply. Unfortunately, the application process can be complicated and present a barrier for people living with mental health issues. Genoa pharmacies regularly work with patients to identify and submit initial applications, and assist with reapplication.

4. Medication synchronization

Reducing the number of pharmacy visits a patient must make helps ensure that patients get the medications they need, when they need them. Pharmacists can coordinate medication refills for patients and family members so that they can all be picked up or delivered on a single day each month.

5. Adherence packaging

Pre-filled pill organizers that show the day and time that each dose should be taken make it easier for patients to remember when to take their medications. Color coding also lifts literacy and language barriers. Genoa Healthcare provides adherence packaging at no cost to patients, one of a number of ways our hands-on approach to pharmacy care helps people stay on their medication plans, and stay healthier.



FIGURE 5:
Adherence packaging for consumers that benefit from pre-sorted doses according to the day and time.

6. Free delivery

The increase in telehealth and health concerns during the COVID pandemic means that in-person clinic and pharmacy visits may be more infrequent. Genoa Healthcare offers free delivery to all consumers who may benefit, as well as convenient curbside pickup.



7. Refill reminder and wellness check calls

Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians can provide personalized phone calls to remind patients to ensure they refill their prescriptions. These calls are more than simply reminders – they are an opportunity to check in on a patient's well-being, answer questions about medications and uncover any concerns or problems before they get serious. If there is a concern, integrated pharmacy staff should be able to contact a patient's provider.



8. Immunizations

People with severe mental illnesses face several barriers to getting vaccinated for COVID-19 and other viruses, including lack of awareness, transportation issues, and concern about cost. This issue can be exacerbated by the current healthcare staffing crunch. Yet people with behavioral health issues can be at higher risk of infection due to underlying health conditions and social impacts.



Pharmacists can screen a patient's vaccination records to see which immunizations are needed, help educate patients about the importance of vaccination and, depending on state law, administer vaccinations. One study found that the availability of these services quadrupled the rate of vaccinations.



FIGURE 6:
Consumer receiving an immunization from a pharmacist.

9. Support for long-acting injectable medications (LAI)

Medications that are delivered by an injection every month or longer maintain stability for patients with some behavioral health conditions, including schizophrenia and opioid use disorder. Where state regulations allow, pharmacists can help support your clinic's LAI administration. Onsite pharmacists can immediately help with prior authorization and deliver a long-acting injectable immediately when treatment starts. Being onsite helps remove any barriers such as transportation to make sure patients get the injection in a timely manner.

10. Monitoring for high-risk medications

Clozapine for treatment-resistant schizophrenia can cause irregular heartbeat, trouble urinating or other side effects that require medical attention. To monitor for these risks, patients need to have their blood drawn regularly. Onsite pharmacies can proactively notify consumers, case managers, and other providers of labs that need to be drawn; and optimize clozapine therapy by effectively navigating the REMS program. The integration of pharmacy care into the clinic setting allows a streamlined system of ensuring the safety of high-risk medications.

11. Medication assisted treatment

Medication assisted treatment (MAT), combined with therapy, is the gold standard for helping patients sustain recovery from substance use disorders and prevent overdoses from opioids. Onsite pharmacies like Genoa help support inductions to MAT, eliminating the need for a consumer to obtain their medication elsewhere and travel back to the clinic. Many of Genoa's pharmacies support clinicians providing MAT to patients, including providing and administering short- and long-acting medications.

12. Support value-based contract measures

A hands-on integrated pharmacy approach can significantly improve health outcomes and lower your overall cost of care – all of which can help your clinic demonstrate value. Genoa pharmacies use a hands-on, specialized approach to pharmacy care that has been shown to lead to a medication adherence rate of 90%, compared to 50% at traditional pharmacies, which keeps consumers healthier. A peer reviewed study also showed consumers at Genoa pharmacies had 18% fewer emergency room visits and 40% fewer hospitalizations.

Value of onsite pharmacies

- Higher medication adherence rates
- Lower rate of hospitalizations
- Lower Emergency Department use
- Cost savings: \$700 per patient annually

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CASE STUDY

Medication adherence

People living with behavioral health conditions often face barriers to staying on their medication plans. Genoa Healthcare pharmacy teams take a hands-on approach to pharmacy services, which helps them both identify and work through these barriers, and improve health outcomes for the people they serve.

For one consumer, that took the form of new packaging. During a typical check-in call with his pharmacy technician, a consumer mentioned that he was experiencing vision loss, and had a difficult time reading the small print on his medication containers. The team quickly worked to find packaging that was easier for the consumer to read, helping further strengthen their relationship with him.

Pharmacists going the extra mile for care

When one consumer stopped into the pharmacy to pick up his medications, he discovered one of them did not have any refills left. The Genoa Healthcare pharmacy team reached out to the consumer's provider after sensing his frustration, who explained that he had to wait until his next appointment to receive his refill.

The pharmacist shared this with the consumer, explaining that he could pick up the medication after his appointment scheduled for the following week. The consumer left the pharmacy increasingly upset, and the pharmacy team overheard him say he was going to take his own life if he did not get his medication. The team immediately reached out to a counselor for assistance, and, after speaking with the counselor, the consumer was able to calmly discuss his medication plan with the pharmacy team. In escalated situations like these, the pharmacy team's ability to work with other members of their consumers' care team can drive positive health outcomes for the people they serve.



FIGURE 7:
Pharmacists take time to interact and get to know their consumers.

Steps you can take to integrate pharmacists into your care team

Having an integrated pharmacy partner is a key strategy clinics can take to improve quality and patient satisfaction, and reduce overall costs of care. So what steps can a clinic take to forge a strong relationship? There are three key steps:

- **Include pharmacists in staff meetings.** It's a simple step, but it can be a game-changer. As part of the broader clinic team, your integrated pharmacist can align with clinic priorities and problem solve when challenges arise. It's also an opportunity for the pharmacist to provide updates on new medications or other clinical developments, and share patient insights.
- **Provide pharmacy access to your electronic medical record.** Build transparency and collaboration by giving your integrated pharmacy access to the electronic medical record to support providers. Pharmacists can more easily help with prior authorizations and assist in monitoring patient data such as lab tests, prescription refills, progress notes, and clinic appointments.
- **Integrate pharmacists in your telehealth platforms and clinic communications.** Regularly include updates on the pharmacy in your newsletters to remind both patients and providers of the services offered. Ensure your website, lobby videos and call-waiting messages mention your pharmacy partner. Coordinate with your pharmacy partner to seamlessly integrate them into your telehealth platform to ensure patients never miss filling a new prescription.



FIGURE 8:
Pharmacists get to know your providers, becoming a vital part of the care team. as part of your care team.

Citation

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