

CuraScript's Human Touch in the Treatment of Rheumatoid Arthritis



Introduction



CuraScript's Human Touch in the Treatment of Rheumatoid Arthritis

Specialty pharmacies are filling a unique niche in the pharmaceutical care market, serving the needs of patients taking biologic medications. Education and patient counseling programs, sometimes described as human-touch or high-touch care, are hallmarks of specialty-pharmacy services. However, perhaps because biologic medications are so new, little empirical information about the impact of high-touch care models is available in the published literature.

To address this need, this exploratory study sought to understand how patients taking biologic medications for rheumatoid arthritis rated services provided to them, comparing CuraScript, a specialty-pharmacy provider, with retail pharmacies.

The study examined patients' understanding of their disease, satisfaction with care and self-reported ability to manage disease symptoms and medication side effects.

Education and patient counseling programs, sometimes described as human-touch or high-touch care, are hallmarks of specialty-pharmacy services.

CuraScript's Human Touch in the Treatment of Rheumatoid Arthritis

A telephone survey was conducted among a sample of patients who filled prescriptions for specialty medications to treat rheumatoid arthritis (Enbrel®, Humira™, Kineret™ or Remicade®), either at retail (n = 200) or through CuraScript, a specialty-pharmacy provider (n = 200), for a period of at least one year prior to June 2006.

The retail sample was limited to patients who did not use a specialty pharmacy (either CuraScript or another specialty provider) during that time.

Patients new to therapy were excluded from the study so that the entire sample would have at least one year of experience with biologic medications. Also, since the goal of the study was to examine differences between experiences with retail and CuraScript, patients who received their specialty therapies from both retail and CuraScript or another specialty pharmacy were excluded.

The survey contained questions about patients' perception of several key process measures:

- To compare CuraScript versus retail, CuraScript patients were asked questions about the CuraScript staff, while retail patients were asked the same questions about "staff at the local pharmacy" where they fill their rheumatoid arthritis injectable prescriptions.
- Patients rated their satisfaction with services received from the pharmacy and assessed the skill level of the pharmacy staff.
- Patients were also asked about whether and how their ability to manage rheumatoid arthritis had changed in the past year.
- Additional questions assessed respondents' knowledge about rheumatoid arthritis, awareness of the signs of infection associated with their medications and knowledge of the importance of medication compliance. Respondents also rated their confidence in handling injection-site reactions and painful symptoms.
- Finally, the survey included the SF-12v2 Health Survey, a standardized, validated and widely used tool that assesses physical and mental functioning.

Calls were made by The Research Edge, an independent market-research firm in St. Paul, Minn., during June and July of 2006.

CuraScript's Human Touch in the Treatment of Rheumatoid Arthritis

Responses showed that CuraScript patients had favorable perceptions:

- CuraScript patients were more likely than retail patients to be completely satisfied (82% versus 74%) and less likely to be dissatisfied (5% versus 10%) with services provided (Table 1).
- CuraScript patients were more likely than retail pharmacy patients to rate the staff as “extremely skillful” (83% versus 72%).
- CuraScript patients were more likely than retail patients to say that their ability to deal with RA is “much better” (42% versus 33%) than one year ago.
- In response to a question designed to test knowledge about their medication, CuraScript patients were more likely than retail patients to state correctly that biologics are not for as-needed pain relief (86% versus 75%).

CuraScript patients were more likely than retail pharmacy patients to rate the staff as “extremely skillful” (83% versus 72%).

Table 1

Patient Ratings of Key Measures

Measure	% CuraScript Users (n)	% Retail Pharmacy Users (n)
Completely satisfied*	82% (163)	74% (148)
Dissatisfied*	5% (9)	10% (19)
Rate staff as extremely skillful***	83% (166)	72% (144)
Much better at dealing with RA**	42% (84)	33% (65)
Understand biologics should be taken on schedule***	86% (172)	75% (149)

Pearson Chi-Square p <.10 **Pearson Chi Square p <.05 *Pearson Chi Square p <.01*

The CuraScript and retail samples did not significantly differ in physical or mental scores from the SF-12v2 (data not shown). Additional research is needed to better understand the significance of these exploratory findings.

Conclusion



CuraScript's Human Touch in the Treatment of Rheumatoid Arthritis

The findings of this exploratory study suggest that patients being treated for rheumatoid arthritis through a specialty pharmacy perceive a greater level of skill among the staff they encounter. They are more satisfied and rate more highly their own ability to deal with their condition, compared to patients using retail.

CuraScript's high-touch specialty-pharmacy model was associated with significantly better performance on key measures of patient satisfaction, disease knowledge and self-rated progress in dealing with the disease. These findings are important because patients who better understand their conditions and how to take their medications may be more likely to comply with their medication regimens. Medications taken properly have a better chance of improving clinical and/or economic outcomes for patients and payers.

Consistent with these findings, CuraScript provides patients access to highly trained staff and clinical programs. The features of specialty-pharmacy care associated with positive outcomes in this population, which has highly specialized medical needs, should be a topic for future research. As the need for biologic medications continues to grow, research of this type becomes increasingly important.

CuraScript's high-touch specialty-pharmacy model was associated with significantly better performance on key measures of patient satisfaction, disease knowledge and self-rated progress in dealing with the disease.

CuraScript's Human Touch in the Treatment of Rheumatoid Arthritis

Baseline Sample Patient Characteristics and Survey Measures by Channel

	Retail	CuraScript
Baseline characteristics		
Number of members	200	200
Mean age	56	57
Female (%)	71	78
Age 55+ (%)	56	68**
Age 65+ (%)	18	23
Age 75+ (%)	6	5
Employed (%)	53	43**
Missed work in past year due to RA	31	22
Self-rate health as excellent or very good (%)	39	36
Taking Enbrel (%)	77	67
Taking Humira (%)	18	22
Taking something else, or >1 drug (%)	5	12
Service measures		
Completely satisfied (%)	74	82*
Dissatisfied (%)	10	5*
Staff extremely skillful (%)	72	83***
Staff very much helped you understand RA (%)	23	29
Staff very much or somewhat helped understand RA (%)	48	53
Ability to deal with RA much better now (%)	33	42**
Ability to deal with RA much better or better now (%)	52	62**
Understands that biologics are not for PRN use (%)	75	86***
Extremely confident can manage danger (%)	66	62
Extremely confident can manage site reactions (%)	78	79
Extremely confident can manage pain (%)	64	66

* p < .10; ** p < .05; ***p < .01

Rows not marked with asterisks indicate higher p values, which means that differences between retail and CuraScript did not achieve the standard of statistical significance.