

The Effects of Message Framing on Conversion of Drugs to Lower Cost Alternatives

Douglas Mager, MA; Mark Bini, MBA

Presented at the
2010 Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy Educational Conference, October 15, 2010, Saint Louis, MO

Background: Message framing refers to words and phrases that are used to communicate to targeted audiences in such a way as to leverage proven psychological principles such as the “illusion of progress.” The illusion of progress proposes that people behave differently the closer they get to an end goal or reward, and that they will accelerate a particular behavior to reach that point faster.

Objective: We report on a letter-based, treatment-control analysis that tested the hypothesis that member communications which employ message framing can be used to improve a member’s likelihood of switching to a lower-cost alternative drug, or moving a prescription from the retail to the home delivery channel.

Methods: A treatment-control study analysis was conducted using two clients that agreed to participate in the study as the treatment sample and multiple clients not enrolled in the program as the control sample. Next, the effect of an illusion of progress message on a member’s likelihood of converting to lower- cost drug and/or home delivery was tested on a population of ‘mixers’ from both samples. Mixers are defined as members that have recently switched a brand drug to a lower-cost alternative and have an additional savings opportunity to switch an additional brand drug to a lower-cost alternative. A multivariate logistic regression model was used to measure the effect of the framing message on the outcomes, controlling for member, drug and plan characteristics.

Results: The study sample consisted of 1,440 members from the treatment group and 18,831 members from the control group. Results from the multivariate logistic regression model showed that members receiving the framing message were more likely to move their drug to a lower-cost alternative in the home delivery channel compared to members in the control group (OR=2.33, 95% CI=1.23-4.40), controlling for all plan and member level characteristics.

Conclusions: These findings hold important implications for employers and other plan sponsors that are looking for ways to effectively communicate with their members and encourage them to take advantage of cost savings with lower-cost drug alternatives or through home delivery.