Traditionally, a pharmacy was considered to have provided quality care when it delivered the right drug in the right dose to the right patient in a timely fashion. But the healthcare system and the expectations it places on pharmacists have changed considerably in recent years. Increasingly, pharmacies are expected to take a more active role in patient care by providing comprehensive support and consultative expertise. Now, they also face growing pressure to undertake a process of voluntary accreditation.

Pharmacy accreditation is a process in which an impartial, third-party organization thoroughly reviews a pharmacy to certify that it operates in compliance with national standards—primarily with a focus on patient safety and continuous quality improvement. Accreditation can take many months because it requires significant work to document policies and procedures in order to meet the standards.

Most commercial payers require that pharmacies—particularly those serving specialty and infusion therapy markets—receive accreditation in order to serve their patients. Not only do payers see accreditation as a means of validating compliance, it ensures that the pharmacy meets professional standards of practice. Third-party accreditation also signals to patients, providers, and payers that a pharmacy delivers clinical and supportive services in a way that promotes safe, high-quality care.
URAC Accredited Health Network

URAC is the most widely recognized accreditation organization. According to EMD Serono Specialty Digest (7th edition), more than two-thirds of health plans identify URAC as the most important third-party accreditation for specialty pharmacies.

Innovatix is a URAC-accredited pharmacy education and training organization.

An Investment with Tangible Returns

Third-party accreditation offers considerable return on investment. It mandates processes that help pharmacies operate more efficiently and safely. Specifically, accreditation can help your pharmacy

- ensure staff compliance with existing policies and standards;
- review current processes to ensure effectiveness;
- identify areas for improvement; and
- help shape quality improvement efforts.

Accreditation can also provide a competitive advantage and boost your pharmacy’s brand image. While the process requires significant effort, obtaining accreditation may help you reinforce strict guidelines and ensure that your team upholds a standard of excellence—one that is officially recognized by an independent, professional accrediting body. And from a business perspective, accreditation is critical for positioning pharmacies for inclusion in both payer networks and for access to higher revenue, limited distribution products.

A Pathway to Specialty

In order to ensure high-quality care and patient compliance, most drug manufacturers limit the number of pharmacies authorized to dispense specialty products. Manufacturer networks typically consist of between five and 20 specialty pharmacies, a small percentage of the overall market that would like to do business in this space. On top of that, third-party payers may further restrict the number of specialty pharmacies authorized to serve their beneficiaries. One of the main criteria for payer network inclusion is whether a pharmacy is accredited. With more pharmacies entering the specialty market, and both manufacturers and payers limiting their networks, competition is increasing. The result will be compressed margins for undifferentiated pharmacies. Therefore, accreditation is now an important strategy for pharmacies that want to remain competitive.

Who Accredits Pharmacies?

Once you decide to have your pharmacy become accredited, you must determine which accreditation to pursue. Your decision should take into account a number of factors, including your area(s) of pharmacy practice, the accreditation requirements, and the value of the accreditation to your business strategy. You also need to consider the availability of internal staff resources, since preparing for accreditation is often labor-intensive.

A number of organizations offer accreditation programs for pharmacies and pharmacies must create and clearly state their policies and procedures against accreditation standards. The accreditation process allows your pharmacy to periodically reassess the participating patient.

The Accreditation Process

The most important factor for pursuing accreditation is strong leadership support.

Preparing for accreditation requires a significant investment of time, money, and process development. Your pharmacy will also need to conduct a robust gap assessment to identify what resources and process improvements will be required in order to meet the standards. Pharmacies should not underestimate the importance of creating the right cross-departmental team to complete the activities related to the accreditation process.

Pharmacy leadership, along with the accreditation team, needs to weigh whether the pharmacy is able to complete the process on its own or if investing in a support service will be more profitable in the long run. Maintained Miller Drug’s Chief Operating Officer, says, “Innovatix has been a pivotal component in our accreditation journey. Without their guidance, this process would have been daunting, time-intensive, and difficult to complete ahead of the nine-month time frame.”

It is also important to start early and stay on schedule. Accreditation requires an application, submission of documents, and an on-site review, and can take anywhere from eight to 12 months. Since most accreditation programs are consultative in nature, there will be back-and-forth communication with the accrediting body. This feedback is critical for the final on-site visit.

To successfully achieve accreditation, pharmacies must create and clearly communicate a detailed project plan— including assignments and timelines. The accreditation team lead can then set regular status meetings to make certain that the submission stays on track or adjust timelines and responsibilities. The goal is to ensure that all of the pharmacy’s policies and procedures are current and reflect the accreditation standards. It is crucial, therefore, for the pharmacy to educate its entire staff on the importance of the accreditation and prepare them for the on-site visit.

Although the process involves extensive time and effort, successfully completing an accreditation program demonstrates your pharmacy’s commitment to the highest levels of care. It creates an environment conducive to identifying strengths and quality improvement initiatives. Finally, the accreditation process proves your pharmacy to distinguish itself in an increasingly crowded marketplace so that patients, payers, and referring providers take notice.

National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP); and the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP).

Standards and Quality Measures

The organizations that offer accreditation programs for pharmacies have standards that are similar, but not exactly the same. Broadly, accreditation measures a pharmacy’s capabilities and performance on such metrics as business management, pharmacy operations, clinical management, and patient care. For quality measures, however, accreditation programs vary in the specific ways they can help your pharmacy improve its care (see following page). For example, URAC, for example, divides its specialty pharmacy accreditation standards into six units (each of which contains its own set of standards).

- Pharmacy core
- 41 standards for pharmacy administration and management
- Customer service, communications, and disclosure
- 13 standards for call center services
- Specialty drug management
- 6 standards for disease state management guidelines
- Pharmacy operations
- 16 standards for dispensing operations
- Patient management
- 16 standards for developing and evaluating clinical programs
- Measures reporting
- 2 standards for annual reporting of data to URAC

Quality Measures

To illustrate specific URAC standards, here are three of the 16 components of the Patient Management category. These examples highlight the importance of patient-centered quality measures.

- Periodic Patient Reassessment Process (Standard 5)
- Coordination of Care (Standard 8)
- Informed Decision-Making with Patients (Standard 9)

The organization has a process to periodically reassess the participating patient.

The organization is able to coordinate care for targeted individuals with care management plans.

The organization implements written policies and documented procedures for the counseling and education of patients.

References


