

COLLABORATION IS KEY

Businesses build partnerships to boost outcomes

BY DAVID ORGEL



In today's healthcare ecosystem, it's much better to partner than to go it alone.

That realization — coming as it does at a time of ballooning healthcare costs and daunting chronic conditions — is increasingly driving stakeholder collaboration across the industry to improve outcomes.

This was a key theme at the *Drug Store News* Industry Issues Summit in New York City, where industry leaders said retailers, providers, payers and technology companies need to work more closely together to improve patient journeys across a range of touchpoints. The discussion was part of a panel on “Payer Partnerships and Delivering Outcomes.”

“Collaboration is the key to medicine,” said Marc Watkins, chief medical officer and vice president of Nashville, Tenn.-based The Little Clinic/Kroger. “It puts the patient at the center of the things that we do.”

Panel moderator Dave Wendland, vice president of strategic relations at Waukesha, Wis.-based Hamacher Resource Group, said that collaboration involves “simplifying the path to wellness, the path to recovery and the path to health management.”

Shannon Huneke, UnitedHealthcare's senior director of strategic alliances, said collaboration enables synergies and makes the healthcare journey easier for consumers. She cited her organization's alliances and partnerships with such retailers as Walmart, Kroger and Walgreens, among others.

“We can't do it alone, nor should we do it alone,” she said. “We see tremendous opportunities among our strategic partners, including retailers, pharma, consumer goods companies and others.”

Such retail venues as pharmacies and grocery stores are great places to recruit customers into a “patient-centric ecosystem,” but retailers can't do it alone, said Alex Hurd, senior director of health and wellness transformation at Bentonville, Ark.-based Walmart.



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Johnson & Johnson Consumer's senior director of shopper solutions Geoff Betrus, UnitedHealthcare's senior director of strategic alliances Shannon Huneke and The Little Clinic/Kroger's chief medical officer and vice president Mark Watkins

“It is, with organizations such as manufacturers, payers, providers and technology companies, that we can start building and accelerating the move to such an ecosystem,” he said.

New Strategies and Technology Solutions

Companies are developing new approaches as they pursue collaborative business models. For example, Johnson & Johnson Consumer has engaged in both external and internal collaboration, said Geoff Betrus, the New Brunswick, N.J.-based company's senior director of shopper solutions.

“We are developing collaborative partnerships with our external customers — retailers, payers and providers,” he said. “We are also driving collaboration internally at Johnson & Johnson across our three business sectors — consumer, pharmaceuticals and medical devices. As the world's largest healthcare company, J&J is working to bring our collective expertise and assets to bear to benefit every patient on their respective journey — especially at the point when they make the transition as patient back to a consumer.”

He said that some five years ago, he wouldn't have thought the consumer organization would be working with such partners as UnitedHealthcare, Aetna or Methodist Hospital. “But we are doing that today,” he said. “We feel there is opportunity to bring different ecosystem partners together to co-create and influence innovative solutions, and our efforts are focused on helping to facilitate these connections.”

The growth of collaboration has been creating opportunities for new technologies that, in turn, further boost efforts through data

integration. A case in point is the Chicago-based company *higi*, whose U.S. network of more than 11,000 health stations enables consumers to obtain biometric health screenings at retail and other community locations nationwide.

“The longitudinal data that's available at our biometric stations is augmented by Fitbit data,” said Vicki Harter, *higi*'s vice president of solutions marketing. “More than 80 different wearable devices can be integrated into a *higi* account. People can take health risk questionnaires and surveys. That provides the ability to use that data to stratify populations and then steer them to the right locations, whether it's a retail pharmacist or a nutritionist, for example, and to identify what the barriers are in adherence and really help them.”

Harter said industry partnerships are the best approach to overcoming hurdles. “The strategy has to come from that collaboration within the payer, provider, retail and community organizations,” she said.

Technology has a big role to play both for patients who are ready to make changes to their behaviors, and those who aren't yet committed, said Jeff Key, managing director at Shreveport, La.-based PioneerRx, which develops pharmacy management systems for retail chains and independent pharmacy.

“Obviously, technology can help patients who already [are] determined they need to be adherent, with tools to be adherent,” Key said. “There also is a role for a different set of tools to try to convince somebody they need to be adherent. How do you use technology to make people care? It needs to be more fun, possibly through gamification, so it allows people to be winners.”

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Walmart's senior director of health and wellness information Alex Hurd (center), speaks as PioneerRx's managing director Jeff Key (left) and Higi's vice president of solutions marketing Vicki Harter (right) look on.

Improving Outcomes for Diabetes

Industry stakeholders are taking a deeper look at how collaboration impacts different stages in patient journeys. A case in point involves diabetes, where it's important that each partner is on the same page for each patient.

"It's about how you weave it together, and how you inform the care team, through their UnitedHealthcare nurse navigator, the pharmacist at Walmart or the nurse practitioner at Kroger," said J&J's Betrus. "If the entire care team is saying the same thing, saying it in a way that has meaning, connecting with the patient on an emotional level versus just telling the patient 'you need to do X, Y or Z,' then you're going to have meaningful change that will result in a healthier patient. There will be value for every stakeholder in the equation."

Betrus added, "That's why it's so important that we look at collaboration beyond just manufacturer and retailer — we have to involve the entire healthcare ecosystem. If we do this successfully, we will build connected patient journeys that amplify the patient's chances of becoming and staying healthier."

Addressing such a challenge as diabetes also involves using data and intelligence to predict the best ways to help our members and shared patients, said UnitedHealthcare's Huneke.

"We see the opportunity to start applying everything that we know about our consumer, in terms of the claims data, but also in terms of predictive modeling," she said. "It's about how we would index an individual, who perhaps may be pre-diabetic, and engage them in a conversation, into a one-one relationship by entering into a new personalized dynamic with their insurance company, meeting their needs every step of the way."

The retail store can help identify needs, Walmart's Hurd said.

"For example, Walmart has [more than] 140 million customers coming through its stores every week in the [United States]," Hurd said. "Those are a lot of touchpoints. How do you use these

Walmart Drives Community-Based Solutions

Walmart is aiming to improve health outcomes with a dual focus on collaboration and community, according to the Bentonville, Ark.-based retailer's senior director of health and wellness transformation Alex Hurd, who described three ongoing experiments to engage consumers.

Wellness Days: Walmart's Wellness Days program has proven that consumers will engage with in-store opportunities for free screenings and immunizations from nurses and pharmacists, Hurd said. This program produces some 300,000 screenings each time Walmart executes one of the events.

"Now the evolution of that is how do you create relationships within the community that you can then use to drive referrals and follow-ups?" Hurd said. "We have worked on this at the national level with partnerships, such as with the Americans Diabetes Association, which follows up with customers and with patients on our behalf."

Accelerated Efforts: Walmart also is conducting tests that build on the Wellness Days approach. "We're partnering with the University of Texas, with UnitedHealthcare and with several local organizations. We're taking the Wellness Days concept but executing it on a much more frequent basis — once a week, getting people into follow-up services, whether that's nutrition education or diabetes prevention programs. We're really learning how to more effectively do community health."

Food Focus: Walmart is participating in an innovative, multi-retailer health-and-wellness effort through the Consumer Goods Forum that involves partnerships with other stakeholders. An experiment in Hagerstown, Md., helps drive collaboration and improve diets and lifestyles in the community. It includes such retailers as Target and Walgreens Boots Alliance, as well as such CPG partners as Danone and Johnson & Johnson.

"The addition of food is something very interesting," he said. "Let's face it, food and lifestyle are big aspects of our health. If we can create easier solutions for educating customers around healthy food and healthy nutrition solutions, that could have profound impact."

moments of engagement to develop a platform for early detection, and then funnel the patient into the greater healthcare system for those individuals that may require follow-up treatment? And then really take a team-based, collaborative approach for supporting the patient and executing his or her treatment regimen."

Patient Education is Crucial

Educating patients is essential to solving health challenges, particularly at a time when costs from chronic conditions are surging, Watkins of The Little Clinic/Kroger said.

"An engaged patient is probably our best defense against this," he said, adding that patients can be made more active by "engaging them with education, engaging them with the opportunity to learn about their conditions, improving that health literacy score."

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higi's vice president of solutions marketing Vicki Harter, HRG's vice president of strategic relations Dave Wendland and PioneerRx's managing director Jeff Key

An important component of education to create engagement is personalizing initiatives for shoppers, Watkins said. He asserted that there will be challenges for “those who don’t personalize, and don’t personalize it to the effect that we can engage with them throughout the journey. We can know the shopper through analytics, through big data, through AI, whatever it may be, in a way that we can capitalize on what’s important to them.”

He said personalization is crucial not only for retailers, “but also for other healthcare systems and healthcare entities in this ecosystem.”

Moreover, he indicated that personalization can extend beyond the pharmacy counter, noting that his organization looks at food as medicine. Kroger has implemented a program in which registered dietitians and store associates help shoppers — in particular those with disease-specific needs — navigate the store for better nutrition.

“It’s very powerful,” he said. “How do we link the dietitians with our clinical pharmacists, with our other clinical entities in order to driver better behaviors?”

Wendland proposed a redefinition of the retail supply chain for industry players who want to make improvements in health outcomes. That supply chain for the patient, he said, “perhaps begins at the pharmacy or in the grocery aisles. However, it now extends to clinics, doctors’ offices, health plans and into the homes. That’s the retail supply chain, and we all need to be participating in it.”

Wendland concluded, “The status quo is not going to be acceptable in the long run in terms of aligning resources, of partnering, of looking for those areas of collaboration.” **dsn**

The Little Clinic Emphasizes Care Coordination

Sharing information and coordinating care for the benefit of patients are both a necessity and a challenge in today’s health system. This is a big area of focus for The Little Clinic/Kroger, and plays an important role in how the company interacts with associates and partners.

“We’re trying to simplify health care at our more than 220 clinics around the country and our 2,200 pharmacies,” said Marc Watkins, chief medical officer and vice president at The Little Clinic/Kroger. He said one of the hurdles involves interoperability of health information.

“One of the important parts about coordinating care is information. How do we share that ubiquitously for the patient, not for the health system, not for The Little Clinic, not for Kroger, but more importantly for the patient?” Watkins said. “That’s coordinating care, getting information at the right time, not two weeks later when it can’t be acted upon. Information in real time is beneficial to the patient — a pharmacist receiving an alert so that they can make a real-time decision for a patient — or it could be with our nurse practitioners or our dietitians. That coordination of care with information is important.”