Many autoimmune diseases such as Crohn’s disease, rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis strike people in the prime of their life, in what should be their most productive years in the workforce.

While the severity can vary depending on the individual, disease complications and progression can result in increased presenteeism, absenteeism and even disability claims.1,2

The arrival of biologic drugs has drastically changed the treatment scene for people with certain chronic autoimmune diseases. These drugs help relieve symptoms and are associated with improved long-term clinical outcomes, allowing many affected patients to remain at work, productive and engaged in life.2,3,4 A variety of patient assistance programs are offered by manufacturers to aid these individuals.

Patient assistance programs are often customized to the individuals and their needs. If they are self-injecting the biologic, they need to know when, where and how to do so. If they go to a clinic to get an intravenous (IV) infusion, they need to understand how to prepare for the experience. Many people also need support navigating the reimbursement environment, and better understanding their condition, how best to manage it, and the treatment they are receiving.

DISEASE AFFECTS PRODUCTIVITY

The impact of autoimmune diseases on work productivity has been well studied; among people with rheumatoid arthritis still employed 13 or more years after the onset of symptoms, for example, productivity losses range from 22% to 76%.2 The drop in productivity may stem either from absenteeism (one study determined that affected people miss anywhere from 2.7 to 30 days of work per year5) or from presenteeism, which some people define as “being there in body, but not in spirit.”
This case management approach helps close that knowledge gap with the patient.

SEAMLESS SUPPORT: THE BIOADVANCE NETWORK

Janssen’s BioAdvance Network, available to patients prescribed REMICADE® (infliximab), STELARA® (ustekinumab) or SIMPONI® (golimumab), is an example of a comprehensive patient assistance program that uses case management. Developed exclusively for the Canadian marketplace, it offers three pillars of services, all of which are facilitated by a local BioAdvance® Coordinator.

BioAdvance consists of an efficient and intricate system of partners and services that aim to give a seamless treatment experience. The philosophy and practice of BioAdvance focuses on the idea of patient wellness, a concept that goes beyond medicinal control of the condition to include the overall state of the individual and how they function in both their personal and professional lives. Ultimately, BioAdvance seeks to ensure the condition and treatment of that condition have the smallest negative impact possible.

At the heart of the program is the BioAdvance Coordinator—the patient’s first, continuous and personalized point of contact. Along with an in-depth knowledge of the drugs involved, BioAdvance coordinators have a strong grasp of the patient perspective and the drug reimbursement landscape. “The process can seem overwhelming for new patients,” says Cheryl Marshall, National Project Manager for BioAdvance. “We take the load off their shoulders so they can carry on with their lives.”

For many people, their first hurdle in seeking treatment with biologics is obtaining reimbursement approval. This can be a complex and time-consuming process. As Dr. Jamie Gregor, Chief of Gastroenterology at Victoria Hospital in London, Ont., explains: “Many patients require both public and private insurance to afford biologics, and the BioAdvance staff are very helpful in guiding both patients and physicians through that process.” Freed from the burden of necessary but time-consuming “hunting and gathering” tasks, patients benefit from more time for work and play.

Once reimbursement has been confirmed, the BioAdvance coordinator steps in to help:

- Close any knowledge gaps the patient may have regarding their new therapy—supporting the patient in taking a more active role in their treatment.
- Confirm a convenient infusion clinic (for patients on IV biologics)—reducing travel time and minimizing the impact on the patient’s work and personal life.
- Assist the patient with the coordination necessary to obtain their prescription—helping ensure patient compliance to therapy.
- Establish a point of continuous and personalized contact with the patient to ensure seamless care.

THE BIOADVANCE PROGRAM PROVIDES AN UNBROKEN CHAIN OF SUPPORT ON FOUR CORE LEVELS:

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BIOADVANCE® SIMPLIFY: comprehensive assistance from the start
BIOADVANCE® SUPPORT: personalized attention at every step
BIOADVANCE® CONNECT: continuous care throughout the journey

Over 600,000 infusions in Canada since 2004
Currently, approximately 100,000 infusions per year
25,000 patients currently enrolled in the program
Over 200 infusion and/or injection clinics across Canada
Clinics spread across the country to serve both urban and rural locations
Approximately 85 BioAdvance coordinators

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THIS SUPPLEMENT IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF JANSSEN INC.
and support—allowing patients to focus on work and other aspects of their life.

This is just the beginning of a case management program that has been developed over the course of the last 10 years specifically for biologics patients. This support is provided at multiple core levels, helping the patient and ensuring they are taking the right product, as prescribed by their treating physician, at the right time.

BIOADVANCE BENEFITS PATIENTS—AND THEIR EMPLOYERS—ON THESE FOUR FRONTS:

CONVENIENCE: One of the key benefits of BioAdvance is the multitude of clinic locations and the long business hours offered in many clinics. These free employees to balance their work, life and treatment more easily, whether they work nine-to-five or shifts. In addition, BioAdvance patients have access to a helpline that is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week to answer questions.

FLEXIBILITY: For patients taking injectable biologics, BioAdvance staff help teach those interested how to self-administer the drugs in the comfort of their own homes. If this option doesn’t suit the patient, their injection can be scheduled with a healthcare professional at a BioAdvance clinic, in the patient’s home or at their workplace. This patient training and the scheduling flexibility of the BioAdvance staff is another feature that helps patients minimize the negative impact of their illness on their lives.

COMMUNICATION: Beyond guiding the patient, BioAdvance staff also communicate regularly with the patient’s physicians, providing updates on the drug administration and informing them of the treatment results. This ensures records are kept

“[THE PRE-INFUSION HEALTH CHECK IS] ONE OF THE CHECKS AND BALANCES WE USE TO MAKE SURE THE INFUSION CENTRE DOES NOT ADMINISTER INFUSIONS AT THE WRONG TIME AND HINDER THE PATIENT’S RECOVERY,” SAYS MARSHALL. THIS PRE-INFUSION HEALTH CHECK ALSO HELPS AVOID DRUG WASTAGE—A COST SAVINGS THAT TRICKLES DOWN TO INSURERS AND EMPLOYERS.

THE INFUSION EXPERIENCE

The idea of going to an infusion centre to get an IV drug understandably makes some patients nervous. Once they’ve been through it, however, “most patients report having a positive—and even comfortable—experience,” says BioAdvance National Project Manager Cheryl Marshall. Many physicians, in turn, “view BioAdvance as an extension of their practice,” she says.

When a patient arrives at a clinic, the health professional supervising the infusion records the patient’s vital signs and asks targeted questions to ensure the patient is infusion-ready. If the patient is fighting an infection or other condition that precludes taking the drug, the BioAdvance team reschedules the infusion. “It’s one of the checks and balances we use to make sure the infusion centre does not administer infusions at the wrong time and hinder the patient’s recovery,” says Marshall. This pre-infusion health check also helps avoid drug wastage—a cost savings that trickles down to insurers and employers.

The actual infusion of the biologic typically lasts two hours, with vital signs monitored every 30 minutes. The comfortable seating, wireless Internet, large tables, and low-stress environment make it easy for patients to keep on top of emails from colleagues or focus on work projects while hooked up to their IV tubing. “Many patients get their work done while receiving the infusion,” Marshall confirms. In this sense, the clinic can serve as an “office away from the office.”

Other patients find value in sharing their disease and treatment experiences with their peers, or take advantage of the health professionals on hand to ask health-related questions. Such activities help narrow the knowledge gap between physicians and patients. Patients better informed on their condition and engaged in their treatment will tend to have better outcomes, potentially benefiting their employer through decreased absenteeism, presenteeism, and even disability.
“THE CLINICS NOT ONLY ADMINISTER THE DRUGS, BUT ARE ABLE TO PROVIDE CARE THAT WOULD NORMALLY REQUIRE A SEPARATE PHYSICIAN VISIT.”—DR. GREGOR

up to date and helps the physician understand the patient’s response and compliance to therapy.

COMPLIANCE: In fact, compliance is a critical part of the BioAdvance offering. Understanding that these products are not administered on a daily basis, patients need to be reminded that their treatment time is approaching. BioAdvance coordinators send out such reminders to ensure patients adhere to their regimen—vital for treatment success—and payers get the best value from their investment. In addition, if a patient happens to be travelling during that period, staff work with them to make sure the necessary arrangements have been made to ensure continuity of care.

FEELING WELL, LIVING BETTER Patients with complex chronic autoimmune diseases can do far better in the long run if diagnosed and treated early. Conversely, many patients who wait months or years before starting treatment can face disease complications and hospital visits. In suitable patients, early intervention with biologics “not only improves symptoms but can prevent complications down the road,” says Dr. Gregor.

Ultimately, the value of biologics to patients, employers and insurers comes not just from the drugs themselves, but from vast networks that support patients on those drugs. BioAdvance builds a true community around the patients it serves. Through a continuous loop of attention and support, the program helps patients get the most out of their treatment, thus preserving their productivity and mitigating third-party costs.

The program has evolved in lockstep with physician and patient feedback, and will continue to progress without ever losing sight of its ongoing aim: to make life easier for patients and the doctors who treat them, and to give insurers and employers the assurance that the drugs they are paying for are being used as intended: to keep patients living well.

REPORTING IN: ADAM SCULLY

While there’s never a good time to get sick, the diagnosis of Crohn’s disease came at an especially inconvenient time for Adam Scully: in the midst of his senior-year high school exams. “After each exam I would come home and not move for the rest of the day, that’s how painful it was,” recalls Scully, now a Toronto-based story editor for The Sports Network (TSN) television station.

Scully’s doctor quickly pegged him as a candidate for the biologic drug Remicade, which allowed him to enrol in the BioAdvance Network. From the first time he stepped into the infusion clinic—a 10-minute drive from his home—BioAdvance staff set his concerns to rest. Concerns about needles, for one thing. “I had some leftover fear from my childhood, but at the clinic everyone is so warm and reassuring that the infusions don’t bother me at all.” While hooked up to the IV delivery system, Scully often finds time for both work and play on his iPhone.

The BioAdvance touch extends beyond the clinic walls, says Scully. “After my first couple of infusions, they called me to ask how things were going,” he explains. “They’re always on top of my appointments with phone and email reminders.” Perhaps most important of all, “everyone is encouraging and upbeat—they’re glass-half-full kinds of people.”

REFERENCE


Gary Berneck, BSD Studio Inc.