

Awareness, fax inefficiency, and portal fatigue: Optimizing your patient support program with workflow integration

It's a problem biopharma has struggled with for years. Biopharma companies have invested heavily in patient support programs that could improve patient access and affordability for high-cost specialty therapies. However, providers and their staff are not aware of these programs, or they have not efficiently and consistently adopted these services to help patients start and stay on therapy.

Workflow integration is a new digital channel that biopharma companies can use to make identifying which patient support programs patients can enroll in easier. It also can reduce friction and optimize enrollment in – and the utilization of – these programs.

In this report, we'll provide new insights into how both fax and online portals limit patient support programs. We'll also examine how workflow integration can address these limitations and identify this new channel's remaining challenges.

A \$5 billion underutilized investment in patient support programs

It's no secret that cost is a major hurdle preventing patients from getting the therapies they need. One recent [analysis](#) found that patients abandon 43 percent of all new prescriptions costing \$125 or more.¹

Biopharma companies have recognized this problem, and many have responded with significant investments in patient support programs. By one estimate, biopharma companies spend more than [\\$5 billion](#) on patient support programs every year.² These programs help providers get patients on clinically appropriate but unaffordable therapies that many cannot access without this support.

About [eight out of ten adults](#) in the U.S. say that prescription drugs prices are unreasonable.³ For patients enrolled in patient support programs, 80 percent of those [surveyed](#) rated them "valuable" or "extremely valuable".⁴ And yet, Cencora's own internal data shows that **only 20 to 40 percent of patients who are prescribed a medication use its associated patient support program.**⁵

What factors are limiting patient support program utilization, and what can be done to improve access to therapy?



Provider awareness of patient support programs

Provider awareness of patient support programs is one key factor. According to a recent [survey](#), **80 percent** of biopharma companies say they rely primarily on providers to communicate patient support program information to patients. However, just **40 percent** of responding providers said they were “very aware” of biopharma patient support programs, with **55 percent** saying they were only “somewhat aware” and **5 percent** saying they were “not aware”.⁶

Even if providers are aware that these programs exist, identifying specific programs that can benefit their patients remains challenging. Provider staff need to search online for these programs and successfully navigate to the correct forms – which can be especially difficult in a crowded market where multiple products and programs are being promoted.

When the correct form is found, whether the patient meets the eligibility criteria for the program may remain unclear. Provider staff may rely on an error-prone process that can include sticky notes or their own spreadsheets – which common provider staff turnover further complicates.

The low awareness of these programs and of the patient criteria are likely major contributors to low utilization and limit the beneficial impact these programs could have on patient care.

A comparison of patient support program enrollment channels

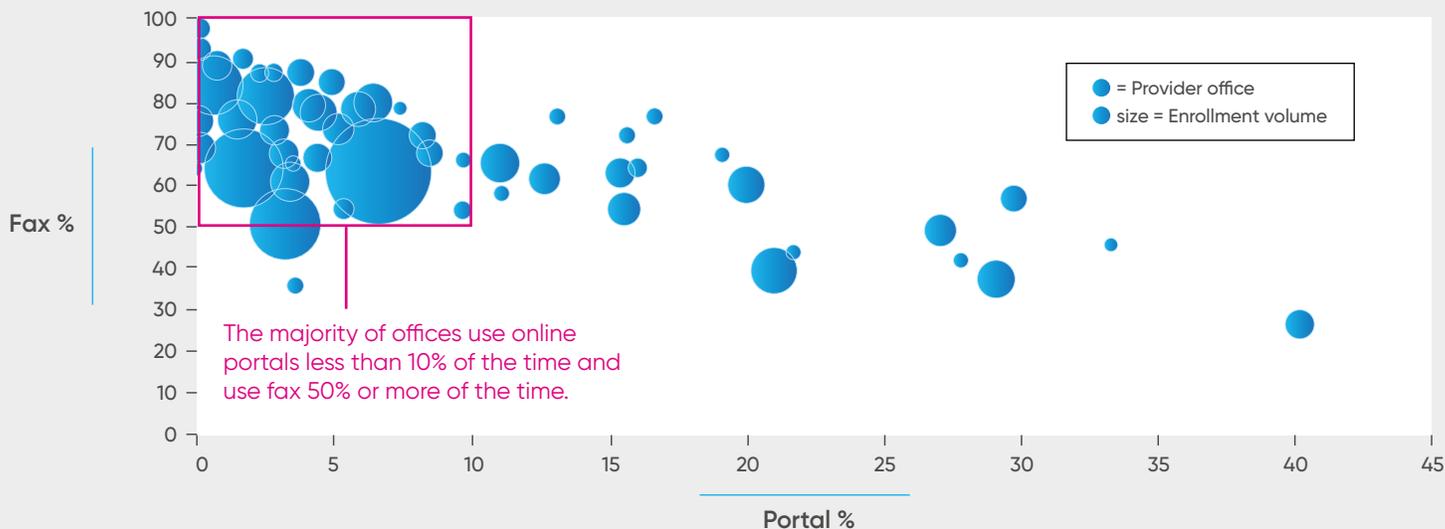
For the providers that are aware of these programs and have patients who meet their criteria, the channels for enrolling patients in patient support programs [have been identified](#) as the most persistent barriers to a patient’s ability to access a critical therapy.⁷

In a recent analysis, Cencora looked at provider usage of the two main channels that biopharma companies typically offer for this purpose: fax and online portals (see Figure 1).

We found **the majority of offices use online portals less than 10 percent of the time and use fax 50 percent or more of the time**.⁵ Portals may have fewer limitations and are more technologically advanced than fax, but that hasn’t convinced most providers, who still prefer fax for patient enrollment.

However, it seems portals can be less impactful only for the more complex patient journeys and services. Cencora has also found that provider and patient portals can be very successful in mitigating access and affordability obstacles. Portal success can be highly dependent on the brand archetype (i.e., product category) and the specific services being consumed.

Figure 1: Provider usage of fax and online portals for enrollment

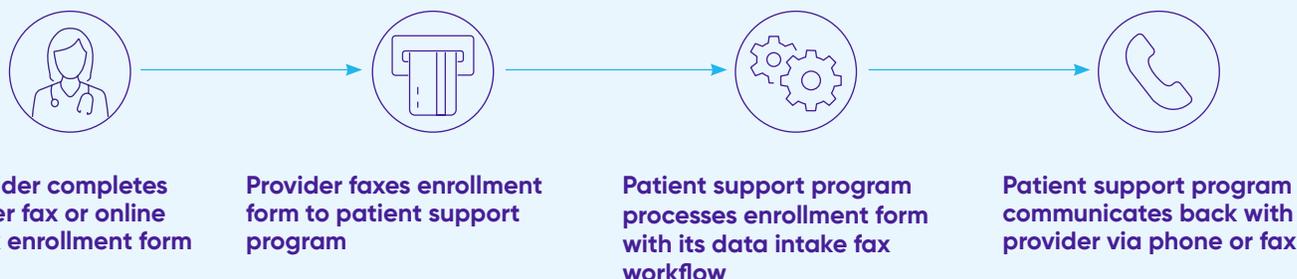


SOURCE: Internal data, 2023

Fax inefficiency

When providers interact with a patient support program via fax, they have to fill out a paper form first. In many cases, this process has advanced to eFax, which requires providers to complete an enrollment form online that they then convert to a PDF and submit electronically. Either way – fax or eFax – the enrollment process is burdensome for providers and inefficient for biopharma companies (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Fax enrollment process



When providers use a fax process, for example, they can't prepopulate the necessary forms with standard patient information. Instead, for eFax, they type in this information, or they must make handwritten entries in the case of paper faxes.

From there, if any entries are missed or illegible (due to handwriting issues or distortions from the fax), providers often find themselves responding to callbacks from the patient support program with requests for clarification.

The friction continues to increase as providers rarely get immediate updates on the status of the enrollment process after sending a fax. There's often uncertainty about whether their patients will be getting support. If and when the program does communicate with the provider, it often does so with a fax or phone call, outside of the EHR and workflow technologies providers use to track patient information.

As labor intensive and error prone as it is for provider staff to enroll patients by fax, it is also an inefficient process for patient support programs. In our own analyses, we've found that for the most complex patient services – like medical benefit buy-and-bill and patient assistance programs – **it can take patient support program staff 20 to 40 minutes to complete a data intake fax workflow.**⁵ Missing information and data quality issues also add time and inefficiency to these programs' enrollment processes.

Portal fatigue

In an effort to address the limitations of fax, many biopharma companies have invested heavily in online portals. Intended to improve the enrollment process, portals often include autocompletion tools that allow for the pre-population of standard information on forms. Portals also reduce data quality issues by doing away with handwritten entries and reduce the risk of missing data by requiring providers to complete certain fields.

Online portals surpass fax processes by including real-time data intake workflow and bidirectional communication capabilities, ensuring that patients can enroll quickly and providers can remain informed throughout the patient's involvement with the patient support program.

And yet, as our analyses has shown, fax remains most providers' preferred channel.

One reason for this may be attributed to **portal fatigue**. As biopharma companies have continued to invest in portals, typically to help build brand awareness, providers are swamped with dozens of portals for any given patient. These portals are in addition to the technologies providers already use to track patient information, including EHRs, other workflow solutions, and payer portals used to process prior authorization requests. As a result, many providers either continue to use the fax process they're familiar with or decide not to enroll patients at all.

Workflow integration and its challenges

A new and innovative digital channel can potentially increase awareness of patient support programs while reducing friction in the patient enrollment process and providing access to other patient services.

With **workflow integration**, a provider's staff does not have to be aware of patient support programs or even look on the web for what programs exist for a patient with certain diagnoses and insurance coverage. Instead, once a medication is prescribed, a notification can be developed to automatically appear in the EHR if a patient meets the criteria for a program. Other workflow tools could also be leveraged for this purpose, including solutions that have been developed for practices in specific therapeutic areas.

For the patients who meet the program criteria, providers could conveniently enroll them through the EHR or another workflow solution. Workflow integration eliminates the need for fax while alleviating portal fatigue, empowering providers to better support patients while reducing workloads.

However, workflow integration comes with significant challenges that many biopharma companies aren't prepared to address.

For example, because the EHR and provider office workflow solution market is highly fragmented, establishing and managing enough integrations to reach a sufficient number of providers can prove difficult.

Furthermore, when a workflow solution is integrated, providers must account for the sheer number and types of tasks they must complete to enroll a patient in a support program. These tasks can vary depending on several factors, including medication, therapeutic area, and coverage type.

These hurdles have, up to this point, prevented workflow integration from catching on. But now a solution from Cencora promises to change that while meeting biopharma and providers where they are.

Introducing Access Network

Cencora's **Access Network** encourages patient support program utilization within existing provider tools. It's a single point of access to multiple patient support programs through a provider's EHR or workflow solution that can automate patient identification, make faxing unnecessary, and doesn't require the use of portals.

With Access Network, providers can more easily get more patients the help they need to start and stay on their treatments. And for biopharma companies, the benefits are clear: better connections with more providers, better visibility into the treatment journey, and most importantly, better patient outcomes.

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