

# Enhancing GI care with specialty pharmacy expertise.

## What are the biggest challenges you're seeing for GI providers today?

GI providers face several significant challenges in today's healthcare environment.

First, they have an incredibly broad scope of practice. They're managing everything from hepatitis C and B to inflammatory bowel diseases like Crohn's and ulcerative colitis, as well as conditions like MASH (Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatohepatitis). This breadth combined with high patient loads can stretch providers thin.

Second, the gap between prescribing a treatment and patients receiving it can be substantial. Insurance coverage hurdles, prior authorizations, and medication costs create barriers to care. Patients may also face challenges like transportation issues or medication adherence difficulties.

Many providers are aware of these challenges but may not realize how pharmacists can serve as valuable partners in addressing them. That's where Walgreens Specialty Pharmacy can step in to help navigate these complex landscapes.

## How can Walgreens Specialty Pharmacy help overcome barriers to care?

For challenges like prior authorizations and insurance coverage, Walgreens Specialty Pharmacy has dedicated teams that are experts in local payer landscapes. They're familiar with local formularies as well as clinical criteria for various treatment options.

When it comes to financial barriers, our teams effectively connect patients

with manufacturer co-pay assistance options as well as grants and foundations that can help lower out-of-pocket costs for patients. Even the best treatment won't help if a patient can't afford it, so we're committed to ensuring patients have access to resources that make medications accessible.

We also partner with advocacy organizations like the American Liver Foundation, the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation and the Global Healthy Living Foundation to raise awareness about conditions like MASH and available treatments. Through these partnerships, we can connect patients with additional resources and support networks and also equip our team members with tools to enhance clinical care for patients.

## Where do you see the greatest promise and opportunity in GI care today?

One of the most exciting developments is in the treatment of MASH. Before April 2024, there were no FDA-approved treatments for this condition, but now we have the first approved therapy available to patients.

This represents a tremendous opportunity to drive awareness that treatment options exist and get patients screened and into care. Approximately 20 million Americans live with MASH, and about 8 million have F2-F3 liver damage, although 90% of those cases are undiagnosed. For that reason, improving awareness and early intervention can significantly improve overall liver health and prevent serious complications.

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**Mallory Schmoll, PharmD, AAHIVP, Therapy Lead, Clinical Pharmacy Strategy at Walgreens** is dedicated to ensuring patients receive comprehensive care for their gastrointestinal health needs. With extensive experience in specialty care, she has specialized knowledge in liver diseases, inflammatory bowel disease, and other GI conditions.

We sat down with Mallory to discuss the state of GI care, the emerging landscape of MASH treatment, and the role of specialty pharmacies in patient outcomes.

“Better GI care is multifaceted. I believe it's our responsibility as community pharmacists to treat patients holistically, as individuals with unique needs and goals.”

— Mallory Schmoll, PharmD, AAHIVP

I'm also optimistic about our ability to provide more holistic care. GI conditions, particularly MASH, involve multiple metabolic pathways and affect many areas of a patient's life—from physical health to mental wellbeing. The interconnected nature of these conditions demands a comprehensive approach.

Additionally, the pipeline for new GI treatments is robust. We're seeing more options either coming to market or existing treatments receiving approval for additional indications. This means more opportunities to help patients achieve better outcomes.

### **What makes Walgreens Specialty Pharmacy unique in GI care?**

What truly sets Walgreens Specialty Pharmacy apart is our enterprise specialty solution and our ability to care for a patient's GI condition while also supporting their care holistically. For example, with MASH patients, we can fill their liver medication while also helping them with their blood pressure medication, diabetes treatment, or weight loss medication.

This comprehensive view of the patient's health is a significant advantage, especially considering the interconnected nature of GI conditions with other health issues. Two-thirds of people with type 2 diabetes have MASLD (Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease), and 75% of people with obesity have this condition as well. You can't effectively treat these conditions in isolation.

Another differentiator is our presence in local communities. Our community-based specialty pharmacies bring clinical expertise directly to providers, allowing us to understand their unique practice challenges. Within this network, we've established specialized GI pharmacies focusing on conditions like hepatitis, inflammatory bowel disease, and MASH. These pharmacists receive additional training and participate in collaborative networks to share best practices and patient resources.

It's worth noting that the first FDA-approved treatment for MASH is a limited distribution product. While other specialty pharmacies may dispense it, Walgreens Specialty Pharmacy is unique in our ability to fill both specialty products and other maintenance medications, giving us a complete view of the patient's medication profile.

### **We know GI patients often have several comorbidities. How does Walgreens Specialty Pharmacy help them manage treatment?**

The key is taking an individualized approach to understanding each patient's goals of therapy. Some may prioritize getting initial symptoms under control, while others focus on improving quality of life or preventing flares.

We proactively anticipate barriers to care, whether that's addressing high out-of-pocket costs through grants and foundations or helping a busy patient stay adherent to therapy through simplified treatment plans.

Our ability to fill and synchronize all medications—not just GI treatments—simplifies the process for patients with multiple conditions. Instead of making several trips to different pharmacies, patients can receive all their medications at once, even delivered directly to their homes.

Most importantly, our pharmacists are accessible to patients anytime. We have frequent, proactive outreach between refills to check on how patients are doing. We're always available for questions or concerns.

### **What does better GI care look like, and how can Walgreens Specialty Pharmacy help?**

Better GI care is multifaceted and holistic. Patients with GI conditions often experience other diagnoses or quality of life issues, so treating the whole patient rather than individual conditions is essential.

It's also individualized—understanding each patient's specific goals, whether that's symptom control, improved quality of life, or other outcomes. And it must be outcomes-driven, tracking progress to ensure we're achieving what the provider and patient want to see.

Walgreens Specialty Pharmacy supports this vision by surrounding patients with care. Our local presence allows us to build relationships with providers and provide a single point of contact they can trust.

We facilitate two-way communication about patient barriers, proactively asking providers about potential challenges when we receive new prescriptions, and informing them about issues we identify.

Ultimately, better GI care is about seeing the complete picture of a patient's health and working collaboratively to improve outcomes.



**Contact your Walgreens Specialty Pharmacy representative to learn more.**

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