

# Aligning Pharmacy Partnership

**S**enior living operators are navigating a more complex care environment than ever before. Residents are entering communities with higher acuity, more chronic conditions, and more complicated medication regimens. At the same time, communities are managing persistent staffing pressure, rising operating costs, and increasing expectations from residents and families.

In that environment, pharmacy providers can no longer be viewed only as medication suppliers. For operators, the right pharmacy partner should help make care delivery more reliable, more consistent, and easier to manage across the day-to-day realities of community operations. It should reduce friction for staff, support safer medication use, help control avoidable costs, and bring clinical and operational expertise that strengthens the care team.

According to Scott Clark, chief clinical officer at PharMerica, a true pharmacy partner must bring to the table in a genuinely collaborative effort clinical expertise and proactive oversight. This collaborative role is becoming increasingly important as senior living communities work to balance three connected pressures: higher resident acuity, constrained staffing resources, and rising costs.

## Higher Acuity Requires Stronger Clinical Oversight

Residents managing multiple chronic conditions often rely on multiple medications, which can increase the risk of drug interactions, duplicative therapy, side effects, falls, confusion, and avoidable hospitalizations. Clark points out that because a resident's clinical profile constantly evolves, the individualized care plan must evolve, as well.

For operators, this means pharmacy support should go beyond dispensing. Communities should expect a pharmacy partner to bring proactive medication review, geriatric expertise, and close collaboration with prescribers and care teams. The goal is not simply to manage a list of medications but to help ensure each resident's therapy remains safe, appropriate, and aligned with evolving care needs.

Clark explains, "Regular medication reviews are one

of the most impactful things we can do. They allow us to identify opportunities such as needed dose adjustments and discontinuation of medications if they are no longer needed. This equates to better disease control and improved quality of life for residents."

This is where specialized pharmacy expertise matters. Older adults respond differently to medication, and their conditions can interact in ways that require careful clinical oversight. Clark stresses that by combining specialized geriatric training with the work of an interdisciplinary care team, consultant pharmacists help ensure that therapy remains safe and deeply aligned with the resident's overall goals of care. A partner with this experience can help communities identify clinical risks earlier, support regulatory compliance, and give care teams more confidence that medication therapy is being managed with the right level of clinical rigor.

## Pharmacy Providers Should Help Ease the Burden on Staff

Higher acuity would be challenging enough in a fully staffed environment. But many senior living communities are still operating with lean teams, competing priorities, and caregivers who are asked to manage more complexity with limited time. That makes operational support from a pharmacy partner just as important as clinical support.

Operators should expect pharmacy workflows that reduce manual work, simplify routine tasks, and help staff spend less time chasing down medication-related issues. Reliable medication delivery, clear communication, refill support, integration with community systems, and responsive local service all contribute to a more predictable day-to-day experience.

One example is cycle fill, which helps communities begin each medication cycle with the exact medications they need. Kelsey Haan, director of account management at PharMerica Senior Living, notes that this process gets caregivers started on the right track at the beginning of each cycle, eliminating last-minute follow-ups. She explains that by actively chasing down pending authorizations before they delay

# with the Reality of Senior Living



Clark



Haan

treatment, the pharmacy team proactively removes administrative tasks from stretched nursing staff.

A pharmacy partner can also support staff through on-site or in-community resources. Mobile technicians, clinical consultants, and nurse-led education can help with medication pass efficiency, cart audits, compliance support, and staff training.

Education is another critical part of staff support. As regulations, resident needs, and medication standards evolve, communities benefit from pharmacy partners that help translate clinical and regulatory changes into practical guidance for care teams. PharMerica's Illuminate education platform and continuing education resources are examples of how a pharmacy provider can support staff development while helping communities stay current on best practices. Haan notes that investing in staff through these educational platforms is also a powerful tool for caregiver retention.

The larger point for operators is simple: pharmacy should not create more work for already stretched teams. It should help remove obstacles, improve consistency, and allow staff to stay focused on residents.

## Cost Containment Starts with Better Medication Management

Operating cost pressure is another area where pharmacy can play a meaningful role. Operators should expect their pharmacy partner to help identify practical ways to make medication management more predictable, affordable, and efficient.

That support can take several forms. Over-the-counter formularies can help residents access commonly used products at lower, more predictable prices. Additionally, financial navigation programs—such as helping families enroll in the Medicare Prescription Payment Plan—can space out out-of-pocket costs while streamlining administrative work for community staff.

But one of the most important cost levers is medication optimization. When pharmacists work closely with providers and care teams to identify unnecessary, duplicative, or redundant medications, the result can be meaningful for both residents and communities. Fewer unnecessary medications reduce cost exposure, simplify administration, and decrease the risk of adverse events.

As Haan reflects, the ultimate goal is to ensure residents are receiving only the most appropriate, highly targeted therapies: “We’re not filling an average of twenty scripts per resident; we’re filling ten, and their well-being is improved.”

## What This Means for Operators

For senior living operators, the “so what” is not that pharmacy support exists; it is whether that support comes together in a way that makes daily operations easier, safer, and more predictable. Many providers can offer medication delivery, clinical support, or education. The more meaningful question is whether those capabilities work together consistently when staffing is tight, resident needs change, and small medication issues become larger operational disruptions.

As Haan emphasizes, a dedicated partner must remain highly adaptable, constantly evolving to address new operational challenges as they arise. When proactive clinical oversight, responsive local support, and clear workflows work together, pharmacy becomes less of a burden to manage and more of an extension of the care environment. ■

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