


Navigating Through the Haze: The Technician Specialist's Role in Addressing Medication Access and Affordability


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Disclosures


- The speaker has no relevant disclosures.



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Overall Objectives

1. Define the role of the pharmacy technician in an ambulatory care setting to help patients with medication affordability needs.
2. Identify the types of interventions made by pharmacy technicians and resources needed to help patients with the rising cost of medications.
3. Describe the patient outcomes and show measured values of pharmacy technicians in an ambulatory care setting.




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Northwestern Medicine System

13 Hospitals

- Northwestern Memorial Hospital
- Prentice Women's Health
- Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago
- Central DuPage Hospital
- Edinor Community Hospital
- Hennley Hospital
- Kishwaukee Hospital
- Lake Forest Hospital
- Marquette Rehabilitation Hospital
- McHenry Hospital
- Palos Community Hospital
- Valley West Hospital
- Wheaton Hospital

512 Outpatient Facilities
72 Primary Care Practices
25 Immediate Care Centers





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Prescription Medications and Affordability

Figure 1
Six in Ten Adults Report Currently Taking At Least One Prescription Medicine; One Quarter Say They Take Four Or More
Percent who say they take the following number of prescription drugs

Currently taking prescription medicine	Percent
Take 1 prescription medicine	51%
Take 2 prescription medicines	11%
Take 3 prescription medicines	11%
Take 4 or more prescription medicines	25%

NOTE: See table for full question wording.
SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (July 11-19, 2022) (PH0)

KFF

Figure 2
About Eight in Ten Adults Say The Cost Of Prescription Drugs Is Unreasonable, But Most Say Affording Prescription Drugs Is Easy

Percent: 82%


of the public say the cost of prescription drugs is unreasonable

Percent: 65%

of the public say affording prescription drugs is easy or somewhat easy

NOTE: See table for full question wording.
SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (July 11-19, 2022) (PH0)

KFF



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Difficulties Affording Prescription Drugs

Figure 3
Who Has Difficulty Affording Their Prescription Drugs?
Percent who say it is difficult to afford the cost of their prescription medicine

Characteristic	Percent
Total	24%
Number of medications taken	
1 to 3	14%
4 or more	37%
Age	
18-29 years	12%
30-49 years	27%
50-64 years	24%
65 years and older	22%
Household income	
Less than \$40,000	32%
\$40,000-\$59,999	22%
\$60,000 or more	18%

NOTE: See table for full question wording.
SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (July 11-19, 2022) (PH0)


KFF

Figure 4
About Three in Ten Say They Haven't Taken Their Medicine As Prescribed Due To Costs
Percent who say they have done the following in the past 12 months because of the cost

Not filled a prescription for a medicine	21%
Taken an over-the-counter drug instead of getting a prescription filled	21%
Cut pills in half or stopped doses	17%
Did at least one of the above	31%

NOTE: See table for full question wording.
SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (July 11-19, 2022) (PH0)

KFF



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NM & Social Determinants of Health Screening

Tools to support Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) Screening

The screenshot shows an Epic Screener interface. At the top, it says 'Epic Screener'. Below that, there's a patient information section. To the right, there's a 'PROBLEM LIST (4)' and 'My Pat List Reminders: None'. Below that, there's a 'SOCIAL DETERMINANTS' section with icons for Medical Home, Mental Health, Medication Access & Affordability, Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Transportation. At the bottom, there's a 'NEWPSW' section with 'Connecting Health Care to Self-Care' and 'Food and Nutrition' sub-sections.

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How and Where We Support Patient SDOH needs?

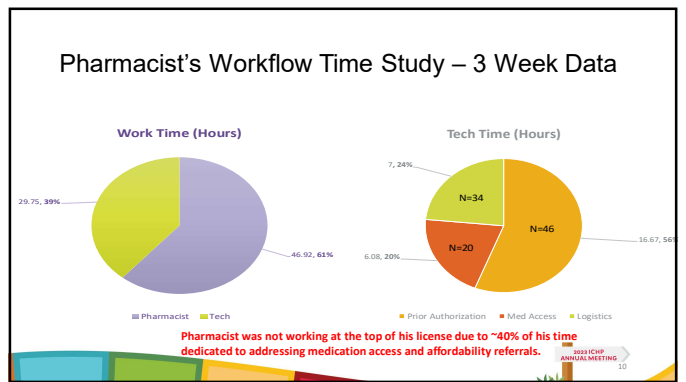
Top 3 Needs	Outreach Programs
Mental Health	Partnering with Community Affairs to leverage community partners for increased support
Food Insecurity	Partnering with Community Affairs to disseminate grocery store vouchers
Medication Affordability	Referring to Ambulatory Pharmacy for medication affordability and access counseling

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Northwestern Medicine Ambulatory Pharmacy Previous State

- Embedded pharmacists in primary care practice program started in 2019 at Northwestern Medicine
- Embedded pharmacists were responsible for addressing patient medication access and affordability
- Approximately 50% of the pharmacist's time daily was spent focusing on medication affordability referrals
- Due to labor intensive medication affordability referrals- pharmacist time was not dedicated to direct patient care
- Based on this model, it was clear that pharmacy technicians were needed.

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Role of an Ambulatory Pharmacy Technician

Enhancing Prescription Affordability	Medication Adherence Support	Health Literacy Support	Addressing Non-Medical Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technicians assist patients by identifying programs that provide financial assistance for prescription medications, such as Medicare Prescription Drug Plan, Medicaid, or Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs). • These programs help reduce the burden of cost-related non-adherence, which affects patients dealing with poverty and other economic stress factors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We implement interventions that boost patient adherence, such as offering medication management and counseling, medication synchronization, and prescription reminders by phone or text messaging. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many patients struggle with low health literacy, which limits their comprehension and adherence to treatment plans. • As a technician, we provide patients with information in simple, easy-to-understand language, and patient education materials relevant to their health conditions and demographics. • This approach helps promote better treatment outcomes and promote long-term patient engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing multiple dimensions of SDOH will require coordination and collaboration with other health care professionals. • As a pharmacy technician, we actively participate in team-based care models that highlight social and behavioral factors impacting health outcomes. • By working hand-in-hand with social workers, care coordinators, and physicians, we identify and address non-medical barriers that decrease healthcare access and contribute to overall healthcare inequity.

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Northwestern Medicine Medication Access Specialist Program Timeline

2019

- Pharmacists reviewing benefits with insurance companies and pharmacies
- Pharmacist determining which programs patients are eligible for and document application outcomes
- Reporting back to MD, following up with patients

2020

- Pharmacy technician working with pharmacist to determine eligible programs
- Pharmacy technician assisting with keeping track of approvals applications, medication deliveries, patient signatures
- Yearly reapplication of patient assistance forms

2022

- Addition of two pharmacy technicians
- Supporting 4 embedded pharmacists in 5 practices

Current State

- Supporting 7 embedded pharmacists in 8 practices
- Areas of support include: Ambulatory Care Coordinators, System diabetes initiatives, Social Determinants of Health

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Pharmacy Technician Workflow

Referral Process

- EPIC Staff In-basket Message
- EPIC Order Entry (Ref 667)

Reasons for Pharmacy Technician Referral

- Insurance coverage
- Formulary verification
- Understanding coverage (out-of-pocket, co-insurance, high deductibles)
- How to obtain medications (which pharmacy to use, mail order, prior auth, step therapy)
- Follow-up (patient, MD, care coordinator, social worker)

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How a Referral is Sent to the Pharmacy Technician

Patient Identification

- Patient name & DOB or EPIC MRN #
- Patient flagged for pharmacy collaboration

Referral Generation

- Medication or pharmacy question identified
- Adherence, affordability, patient assistance

Medication Issue Identified

- What do you need assistance with?
- General affordability question or patient specific?
- What have you attempted prior to referring?
- Additional important information to share?

Communication

- Time sensitive deadline? Response needed urgently, non-urgent (please include time frame needed for response).
- How should follow-up information be relayed? Report back to: Care Coordinator, physician, community health worker, patient
- Send referral to pharmacy technician via specific pharmacy technician pool

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EPIC Staff Message In-Basket

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EPIC Order Entry for Pharmacy Technician Referral (REF667)

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EPIC REF 667 Referral Work Queue

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Assessment Question #1

What are the top 3 patient needs based on our SDOH screening?

- Food insecurities, mental health, shopping
- Mental health, shopping, doctor visits
- Medication affordability, food insecurities, mental health
- All of the above

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The Pharmacy Technician's Process

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Ambulatory Pharmacy Technician's Approach to Patient Referrals

- **Helping understand Drug Benefits and Coverage**
 - Gathering basic information about patients coverage. Typically, the initial approach to resolving inquiries related to drug benefits involves requesting the patient to provide their identification (ID) card. By doing so, technicians should be able to answer most, if not all of the inquiries specified below.
 - a) What is the coverage? Commercial insurance plan? Part D?
 - b) Is coverage up-to-date?
 - c) What is the drug benefits offered through plan?
 - d) Is there a deductible? If so, how much has been met/remaining?
 - e) Any additional insurance benefits?
- **Commercial Insurance**
 - Pharmacy Technicians have the capacity to retrieve information regarding a patient's unique drug coverage benefits through online or telephonic means with commercial plans. Acquiring personalized details may require a phone call, which often takes a significant amount of time due to waiting periods or transfer to numerous departments. As a result, pharmacy technicians are frequently tasked with calling healthcare plans to obtain necessary information.
 - There, understanding the use of "tiers", or prioritization levels for drugs, is crucial when it comes to drug coverage plans – like commercial plans. The tier that a drug belongs to will determine the amount of coverage given by the plan, and the copayment amount the patient is responsible for.
 - Commercial plans use a four-tier system. Many plans now assign two tiers for generic drugs, which can result in lower copayments for some medications. Certain organizations use formulary with live tiers, categorizing specialty drugs into less or more expensive categories.
 - Each insurance company determines where a particular medication falls within its formulary tier, which affects the out-of-pocket (OOP) expenses.
 - Pharmacy Technicians look for ways to recommend drugs that fall into more favorable tiers, benefitting both the patient and the payer.

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Ambulatory Pharmacy Technician's Approach to Patient Referrals

- **Government-based programs**
 - **Medicaid**
 - Medicaid is a program operated at the Federal and State levels.
 - Medicaid covers medical expenses for individuals and families with low income and limited assets.
 - Cover most if not all maintenance needs at \$0 cost to patient.
 - Patients may have to pay a share of the expense or spend-down if their income or assets exceed certain thresholds.
 - **Medicare Part D**
 - Medicare is a health insurance program that offers coverage to American citizens aged 65 or older
 - It also offers health insurance coverage to younger individuals with specific needs such as multiple sclerosis (MS)
 - Medicare offers many types of coverage only of which 1 pharmacy technicians assist: Part D.
 - Drug coverage benefits are provided through Medicare Part D.
 - Coverage is available either as a stand-alone prescription drug plan or as an integrated managed care plan.
 - Both offer medical and prescription drug coverage.
 - No single component covers all of a persons medical cost.
 - **Medicare Part D "DONUT HOLE"**
 - Individuals enrolled in Medicare Part D can face coverage limits that cause their drug coverage to temporarily halt or change.
 - This is the coverage "gap" also known as the donut hole occurs after the combined expenses of the patient and their prescription plan reach a yearly amount set by CMS.
 - During the gap, patients are responsible for covering up to 50% of the cost of their branded medications and up to 35% of generic costs until they reach the required spending limit for the year.

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Assessment Question #2

Which Medicare plan covers prescription medications?

- A. Part A
- B. Part B
- C. Part D
- D. Part G

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Medication Assistance Programs

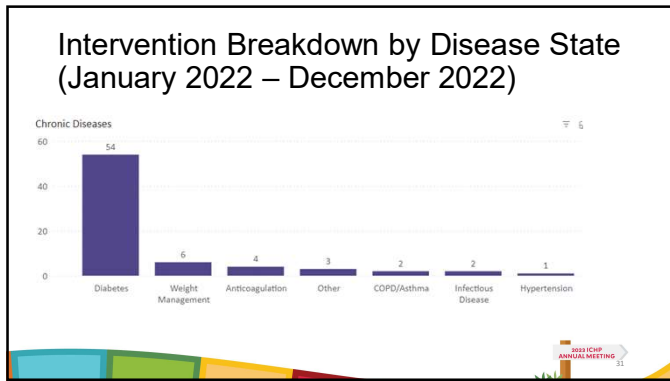
- **Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs)**
 - Depending on their existing coverage, individuals can expect varying benefits from these programs.
 - Generally, those without insurance may be eligible for a free medication supply for a limited time.
 - Provided by drug companies to assist financially challenged patients in covering their medication expenses
 - The manufacturer's PAP website contains information about the requirements for specific medications- for patients, their caregivers or representatives.
 - Application forms may be obtained by downloading or completing online for certain programs-if eligible PAP benefits typically last for 6 to 12 months and must be renewed upon expiration.
 - Patients may be required to submit specific details on their application such as:
 - Income
 - Name of drug they are requesting
 - Whether the patient is uninsured, has private insurance, or government-sponsored insurance
 - Household size

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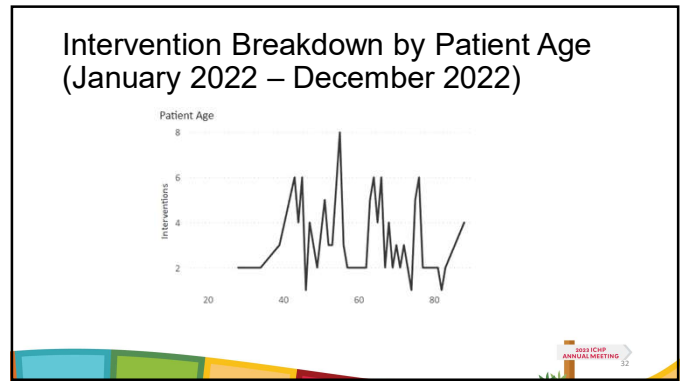
Medication Assistance Programs

- **Low-cost Generic Options**
 - Various major retail pharmacy chains provide discount programs for generic drugs that are commonly used and not expensive.
 - If a patient can obtain a prescription for one-month supply at a cost of \$4, it is more cost-effective in comparison to going through the process of submitting a claim for coverage.
 - While some programs require an application and/or a membership fee, most are easy to join.
 - GoodRx.com is a means to find the most affordable cost for particular drugs
 - Some pharmacy chains with discounts generic programs include:
 - CVS
 - Walmart
 - Kroger
 - Walgreens
 - Costco
- **Other Financial Assistance Programs**
 - Various governmental and non-profit charitable entities provide programs to assist patients with expenses like drug co-pays, medical equipment, home health care, transportation, and additional necessities.
 - **Chronic Disease Fund (aka: Good Days foundation):** This organization provides copay assistance for patients with chronic diseases who meet eligibility requirements. Email: info@gooddays.org Phone: 877-868-7233
 - **Healthwell Foundation:** A nonprofit organization that offers copay, coinsurance and premium assistance. Email: www.healthwellfoundation.org/ Phone: 800-675-8416
 - **Patient Access Network Foundation:** Copayment assistance from \$500 to \$14,000 per year depending on diagnosis. Patient must be insured with coverage for medication and meet the Financial criteria. www.PANfoundation.org 866-316-7263

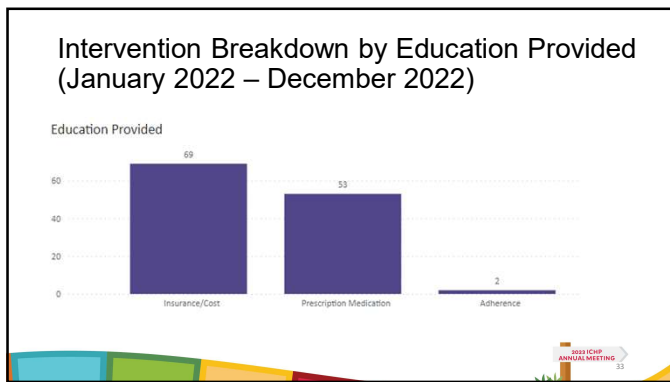
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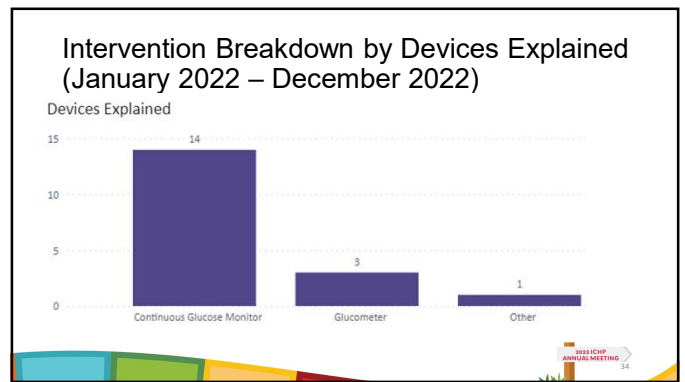
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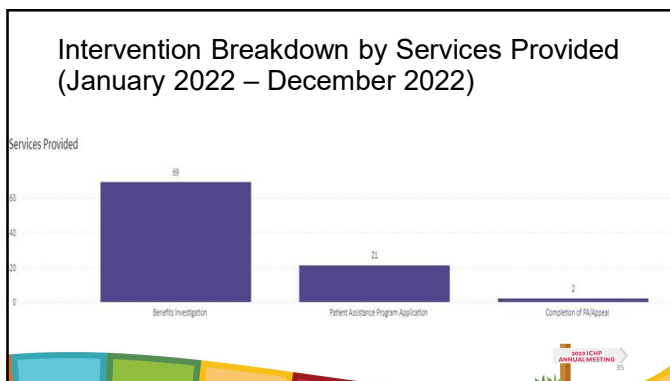
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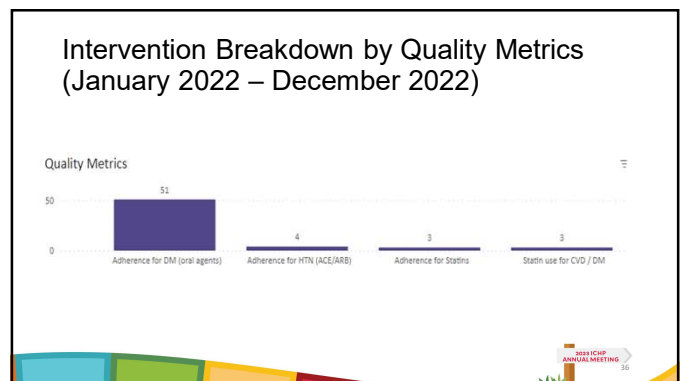
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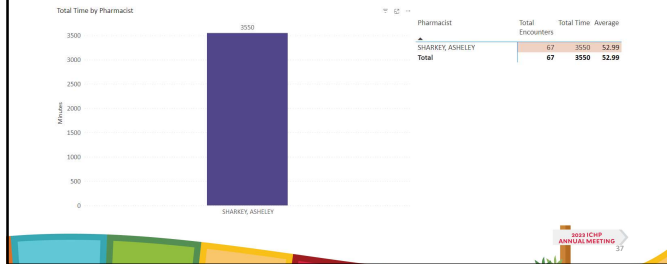


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Intervention Breakdown by Time (January 2022 – December 2022)



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Assessment Question #3

Which of the following patient outcomes data was **NOT** mentioned in this presentation?

- A. Patient Referral Volume
- B. Patient Medication Cost Savings
- C. Intervention Breakdown by Race/Ethnicity
- D. Average Pharmacy Technician Time per Intervention

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Case Study #1

Patient with Insulin and Test Strip Affordability Concerns

- Referral to Northwestern Medicine pharmacist from care coordination that patient wanted to discuss affordability of insulin and test strips. Patient has "Part D" Medicare Advantage Plan.
- Pharmacy technician called patient and reviewed patient assistance programs, eligibility and income requirements and coverage for test strips.
- Pharmacy technician outreached to patients plan to review prescription coverage and potential savings for his medications.
- Pharmacy technician contacted patient and reviewed reason for high-cost was their prescription payment was applied to deductible, reviewed medication tiers and plan coverage details (For this plan deductible applies to Tiers 3-5).
- Pharmacy technician reviewed phases of coverage and alerted member of a payer program resource that he could be connected to that would determine if he would qualify for extra help or a low income subsidy.
- Patient was provided with abundant resources to assist with affordability.

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Case Study #2

Patient needing assistance with medication costing over \$1000

- Northwestern Medicine pharmacist received a patient referral from a care coordinator stating that the patient is having a difficult time paying for her medications copays.
- The patient has Medicare Advantage as her primary insurance.
- Contacted pharmacy benefit manager and requested a benefits investigation for this patient looking for opportunities for cost savings for her medications.
- Findings were that this patient **had entered the Donut Hole** In this phase of coverage (**DONUT HOLE**)- patient is responsible for 33% coinsurance (Xifaxan (Tier 5) now costing \$1087.56/30 days)
- Using Needymeds.com- pharmacy technician was able to find Patient Assistance Program (PAP) with drug manufacturer.
- Reviewed requirements- reviewed with patient, sent over materials for MD signature
- Pt now able to receive medication Xifaxan- a tier 5 drug costing her over \$1000- **FREE delivered to her home monthly**. That's a yearly savings of **\$13,050.72!**

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Next Steps

- Growth of pharmacy technician program to provide medication affordability resources to additional providers/pharmacists across NM
- Expansion of pharmacy technician services to disease state practices outside of primary care
 - Cardiology
 - Infectious Diseases
 - Oncology
 - Behavioral Health
- Streamline pharmacy technician workflow to allow for optimization of patient referrals and coverage

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Questions?
Thank you!!!

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