Appointment-Based Medication Synchronization Pharmacy Programs: "One Size Fits All" Doesn't Work in a Diversified Market

Medication synchronization requires all of a patient's prescriptions to be dispensed on the same refill cycle, and all new prescriptions to be filled initially on a partial basis until they are synchronized with existing prescriptions. Customers are required to make an appointment each month to pick up their prescriptions, and can request or waive counseling with a pharmacist to review their therapies.

A few pharmacies have experimented with an approach to consolidating prescription deliveries to once monthly on an appointment basis. Advocates for this approach claim that it will improve patient adherence to their drug regimens. Pharmacies also note that it increases customer loyalty to the sponsoring pharmacy while increasing pharmacy revenues and lowering operating costs.

While helpful for pharmacies, however, any evidence that medication synchronization helps patients with long-term medication adherence is limited and it has not been studied rigorously on a national scale.

Medication Synchronization is not appropriate for most patients

- Medication synchronization may make sense for the limited number of patients with several chronic conditions who take multiple drugs and have a high risk of medication error and overmedication. It is not, however, appropriate for all patients, including those who:
  - Have acute illnesses treated with short-term therapies;
  - Take specialty drugs requiring more frequent monitoring;
  - Are starting new therapies where medications and dosages are subject to change;
  - Have interruptions in drug therapy due to hospitalization or long term care;
  - Work long hours or travel; or
  - Are working parents seeking medications for their children.
- Medication synchronization cannot be applied in skilled nursing facilities in which short-cycle dispensing of 14 days or fewer for brand solid oral dose drugs is mandated by the Affordable Care Act and Medicare regulations.
- Drug therapy for chronic diseases is not static and often changes over time; medication synchronization is a rigid approach not easily modified to accommodate such changes.

Medication Synchronization enhances pharmacy, not customer, convenience

- Information about these programs emphasizes the cost savings, potential for revenue enhancement, and staff convenience for participating pharmacies.
- The pharmacy, not the customer, determines when it will fill prescriptions.
- Partial fills for new prescriptions may increase customer costs due to higher dispensing fees, or may disrupt patients' personal budgets if a large number of copays are due on the same day.
- Medication synchronization imposes severe limits on customer choice and convenience.

Medication Synchronization is a "one size fits all" approach and is not appropriate for adoption as a statutory or regulatory requirement

- Medication synchronization has limited application in a diverse market for pharmacy services.
- It has not been shown to be cost-effective, or ready for wide scale adoption.
- It is an evolving undertaking requiring expert clinical judgment, and is not an appropriate subject for proscriptive legislation.