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# General Mills Offers Workers Tailored Drug Management

BY RICK BYRNE

Employees of General Mills Inc. who take multiple medications have a new option this year that combines technology and disease management to bring them the benefits of their own personal pharmacist. If the program catches on with other employers, not only will providers be working more closely with pharmacists, but insurers and vendors will be hustling to meet a new standard of member satisfaction and quality.

The program known as MyMedsManagement, from the Minnesota company Medication Management Systems, began on Jan. 1, and gives General Mills' employees access to a specially trained network of pharmacists, including a pharmacist at the company's own worksite health clinic one day a week. The pharmacist works with employees on an ongoing basis to help them better understand the medications they are currently taking as well as to resolve any drug therapy problems.

General Mills, based in Minneapolis, operates the on-site clinic at its headquarters, but as a multi-state company with significant business in Michigan and elsewhere, connects all eligible members electronically and by telephone to the service.

"MyMedsManagement is an innovative complement to the variety of healthcare and disease management programs General Mills has offered for years," Tom Albers, a registered pharmacist and vice president of sales and marketing for Medication Management Systems, said. "The company offers a very rich benefit, and selects a number of programs for employees to choose. High utilizers are not the only ones who can benefit from MyMedsManagement, but that was General Mills' focus, the people with complex medicine cabinets."

Starting with an electronic therapeutic record developed at the University of Minnesota, Medication Management Systems wrapped around it a patient-centered medication therapy management program that focuses on identifying problems with medications and getting patients on the right drugs to achieve their therapy goals. The on-site pharmacist then can provide advice and education to the employee and connect with the patient's providers or pharmacist as necessary. Call it disease management, with the focus on medication.

In addition to having their medication questions answered, patients receive a comprehensive summary of all their current medications and any recommended medications, which may include options for over-the-

counter drugs and herbal supplements. They also receive a calendar describing how to take the medications. The pharmacist relays necessary feedback to the patient and his or her physicians.

The data MMS has gathered from other clients of its electronic therapeutic record shows savings to the third party payor and to patients. The savings are most frequently captured from avoided medical costs rather than drug spending reductions. “A patient could have a cabinet full of low-cost medications, but still have drug therapy problems which can become very costly medical issues,” Albers said.

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### Table 1-1: General Mills Employee Benefit Plans At A Glance

» General Mills covers 13,844 lives in its primary employee benefit plan.
» General Mills enrolls 11,551 members in its prescription drug benefit plan.
» General Mills covers 3,664 people in two benefit plans for its bargaining groups.
» General Mills provides retiree and other continuation coverage for 9,867 people.

Source: HealthLeaders-InterStudy Employer Vantage

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### Company Finds Almost A Third Of Covered U.S. Members Eligible

MMS requires the contracted pharmacist to conduct a patient assessment on each member who signs up. From that assessment, the pharmacist then determines which medications might be causing problems. While no particular class of medications causes more problems than another, certain conditions that are prone to comorbidities, like diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol, can easily lead to patients taking as many as 13 or 14 different pills.

“In evaluating claims data we look for indicators of medication problems,” Albers said, noting that among the eligible members with high medical utilization and multiple medications, 30 percent were found to be taking the drug Lasix, a diuretic indicated for high blood pressure and congestive heart failure. The high percentage of a single medication among multiple-medication patients suggested a population that could benefit from medication management. He also noted that among patients with diabetes MMS has studied, half of the medication problems patients had were with medications that had nothing to do with the treatment of diabetes. “When you identify medication issues that are preventing patients from achieving the intended outcome, good things happen,” said Albers. “But you need to look at the patient in total, not by a single medical condition, or you miss opportunities for improving care.”

According to HealthLeaders-InterStudy data, the Minneapolis-based company has 13,844 covered U.S. employees, and a total active group representing 17,508 covered lives, and 9,867 covered retirees. In this early stage of the program, only salaried workers are participating. Around the country, Albers said 5,000 General Mills covered members are eligible to participate, though enrollment remains optional. General Mills pays an additional per-member charge for each enrollee.

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### Table 1-2: General Mills Inc. Financial Results

Year	Revenue	Net Income
2008	\$13.7 billion	\$1.3 billion
2007	\$12.4 billion	\$2.3 billion

Source: Securities & Exchange Commission

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General Mills operates in over 100 countries and markets more than 100 consumer brands, including Cheerios, Haagen-Dazs, Nature Valley, Betty Crocker, Pillsbury, Green Giant, Old El Paso, Progresso, Cascadian Farm, Muir Glen and more. Its Michigan locations include a plant in Reed City that produces, among other

things, Yoplait yogurt—the world’s largest yogurt plant, according to the company—and business offices in Kalamazoo. General Mills self-insures, and its Michigan groups are administered by Priority Health. Medco is the company’s sole pharmacy benefit manager.

### Stakeholders See Varying Impacts

The impact to the stakeholders in the patient’s care depends on identifying medication problems that prevent patients from achieving therapeutic goals. Compliance isn’t the only factor in that equation. In deciding which medications are most effective, MMS looks first at indication, then effectiveness, then safety, and finally compliance. “The choices become very easy after that. If a drug is not working, you don’t want to emphasize compliance. We use these guidelines in training the pharmacist how to provide service.”

It might be easy to conclude that providers and pharmacists would collect less revenue from patients whose conditions come under better management. To some extent that’s true. A patient who is finally getting the right dosages and combinations of medication will stop coming to the doctor’s office as often with complaints that something isn’t working. But compliance with drug regimens also frequently drives up sales volume of certain drugs. General Mills’ prescription drug plan has a formulary, and Albers said MMS is working with clients on developing evidence-based formularies to encourage better outcomes. Where a brand-name drug achieves the best outcomes, the patient won’t be pressured to substitute a generic.

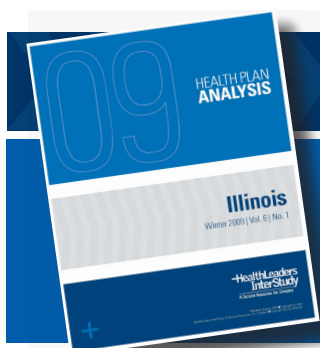
“At a certain point, the formulary really becomes irrelevant, as we are looking for the drug that works for the patient,” said Albers. “It’s not about cost savings as the sole objective. The objective is getting the right drug for the right patient, and that is all about appropriate use, achieving goals and targets; and not always just cost reduction.”

When MMS achieved success with its approach, it looked at partnering with disease management companies, but eventually decided against that idea because the DM industry was focused too much on specific disease states, and the business model of some of these companies called for excluding certain medications based on cost.

Feedback from the members indicates they are happy about being able to talk to a pharmacist and better understand their medications. Management at General Mills has been so happy with the service, the company CEO remarked on it when he spoke at President Barack Obama’s recent healthcare summit.

### Outlook

***General Mills appears to have hit on a disruptive technology with MyMedsManagement. In making cost considerations subordinate to achievement of therapeutic goals across a population, it has distanced the care delivery model from financing. That means patient satisfaction becomes the deciding factor in the selection and retention of insurers, vendors and networks, putting patients—and therefore employers—in the driver’s seat.*** ■



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