



How Ophthalmologists Can Eliminate Late Surgery Cancellations Caused by Medication Issues

For many ophthalmologists, cataract, LASIK, PRK and other surgeries account for a significant portion of their revenue. Unfortunately, late cancellations of these procedures are not uncommon, causing ophthalmologists to lose significant revenue each year. A study of elective ocular surgery scheduled at the Dallas VA Medical Center in Texas over a five-year period found that 13.6 percent of procedures were canceled on the day of surgery for a variety of reasons.

According to a study that was conducted at Tulane University Medical Center and presented at an American Society of Anesthesiologists Practice Management Conference, ophthalmology surgeons lose an average of \$3,701 in revenue for each late surgery cancellation.

Late Cancellations Due to Medication Reasons

Medication issues can cause late cancellations. With cataract surgery, for instance, patients typically must take three types of drops – a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), an antibiotic and a steroid – for several days prior to surgery. For multiple reasons, patients often fail to take the drops as prescribed.

What Can Go Wrong

Prior to cataract surgery, for instance, the doctor's office will send prescriptions for an NSAID, antibiotic and steroid to the pharmacy. It is common for insurance companies to deny coverage for one or more of these medications. When this happens, the pharmacist may call the doctor's office to discuss alternatives. This causes inconvenience and wastes valuable time of doctors and their staff. In some cases, the pharmacist will not call the doctor, but will switch to an alternative medication that is covered. Unfortunately, in many cases, the doctor is not comfortable with the alternative medication. While most doctors find generic antibiotic drops acceptable, most prefer a brand-name NSAID. When it comes to steroid drops, about half of doctors insist on the brand name. When a doctor finds out just before surgery that the patient took a generic drug, the doctor may not be comfortable performing the surgery.

In another common scenario, the pharmacist will dispense the prescriptions as written and present them to the patient for the denied cash prices, which can be upward of \$1,000 for three brand-name drops. Patients in this scenario may balk at the high prices and just show up for surgery without taking the drops.

In sum, patients can arrive at surgery either having failed to take the needed medication or having taken medication that the doctor does not approve of. Either way, the doctor won't perform the surgery, which takes revenue out of the doctor's pocket.

Our Proactive Solution: The OPS Med Crosscheck Program

The OPS Med Crosscheck Program is a multi-tiered program that removes barriers to patients receiving and taking the necessary medications and ensures that doctors are not blind-sided by a patient's failure to take the medications as prescribed.

1. OPS-Doctor Relationship

OPS, a specialty pharmacy with a focus on ophthalmology, establishes a relationship with the doctor's office for all prescription needs, and we stay in contact to prevent prescriptions from falling through the cracks. When patients fail to take possession of their medication, whether due to cost or some other reason, we keep the doctor's office informed. Depending on ophthalmologist preference, we can send a weekly report listing all medications we dispensed to patients that week and/or we can place a call or send an email (depending on preference) to the doctor's office each time a patient does not take possession of a medication in a timely manner. When we cannot reach a patient, we will contact the doctor's office for alternate contact information.

2. Doctor's Formulary

Once we have established a relationship with the doctor, we develop a protocol list or formulary for each doctor based on the doctor's preferences. For example: "Fill the NSAID drops as Choice 1, and if not, then Choice 2, then Choice 3." For some drugs and some doctors, there may be only one choice. With this preference list, we dispense according to the doctor's wishes, without the doctor's office being inconvenienced with follow-up questions – or worse, having the patient show up for surgery having taken medication that the doctor does not approve of.

As brand medications typically reimburse a pharmacy poorly, pharmacies are disincentivized from filling brand-name drugs. Unfortunately, many pharmacies are therefore quick to switch to a generic when filling prescriptions. Our ophthalmologist partners know that OPS does not make dispensing decisions based on margins and that we will stay true to a doctor's instructions. By creating a formulary with the prescriber, we ensure that only the medications chosen by the doctor are filled.

3. OPS Proactively Helps Patients Afford Meds

At OPS, we are prior authorization specialists, and we are well-versed in every available voucher and coupon program for ophthalmology medications. We know which ones apply to government-insured, privately insured and uninsured individuals. We proactively examine which solutions are available for each patient to make the medication more affordable.

In the worst-case scenario, the patient has a prescription for brand-name NSAID, antibiotic and steroid drops and the patient either does not have insurance or their insurance does not cover these drugs. Each product can cost about \$300 or more.

Our team gets to work. We check the doctor's formulary and we see that the doctor has indicated that we must dispense the brand-name drugs for both the NSAID and steroid, but that generic alternatives are acceptable for the antibiotic. We find vouchers that get the brand-name NSAID and steroid down to about \$60 each, and we fill a generic antibiotic for \$15. The patient's bill goes from \$900 to \$135, and we have solved the problem before it becomes an issue. The patient was never hit with an outrageous charge, the patient never called the doctor's office to complain about the insane prices, and the pharmacist did not have to call the doctor to discuss alternatives.

4. Advance Rx Planning

OPS offers doctors the ability to plan prescriptions ahead of time. Some of our largest clients send us 400 to 500 prescriptions a month, and they book surgeries several months in advance. They send us prescriptions in March for June or July, and we can troubleshoot any problems well in advance and set up delivery to patients for the appropriate time in the future.

5. Getting the Drugs to the Patients

OPS is fully stocked with all ophthalmology medications, and we further ensure that prescriptions get into the hands of patients by providing free delivery. Through our 24/7 customer service, we answer patient questions, to solve issues that may arise that prevent them from taking their medication properly.

By proactively solving multiple potential medication issues in real time, OPS allows patients to get and take the medication required by the doctor to proceed with the surgery. The doctor does the surgery and collects payment, and everyone goes home happy.

About OPS

OPS, a Community Care Rx company (opharms.com), is a specialty pharmacy with nationwide reach. We are based in Syosset, N.Y. and are licensed in all 50 states. We have specialized expertise in ophthalmology drugs as well as neurologic medications and opioid treatments.

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