

Adaptive Connections: How COVID-19 Transformed the Pharmaceutical Industry-Rheumatologist Relationship

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The COVID-19 pandemic undeniably changed the way rheumatologists and pharmaceutical companies engage and interact, and many of those changes are here to stay. During COVID, technology became a crucial tool to remain connected when we were forced to be apart. Yet, as we have now learned through experience, the further integration of technology into workflow across the healthcare industry offers both pros and cons.

For highly in-demand specialists like rheumatologists, the shift to virtual or limited availability to be seen in-person impacted not only patients but relationships with the pharmaceutical industry. As these relationships are helpful to ensure rheumatologists have access to the latest treatment information and product updates, assessing the past, present, and future of the pharmaceutical industry-rheumatologist relationship revealed:

- In-person still matters. Many rheumatologists who went completely virtual during the pandemic have reopened their doors to meet with pharmaceutical representatives again. The need for and importance of in-person interactions remains an irreplaceable aspect of maintaining and fostering these relationships. Nothing can replace in-person interaction, and that will remain an important aspect of relationship building.
- Convenience remains top-of-mind. Integration of virtual platforms such as Zoom allows both parties to remain connected when factors such as distance and scheduling impact in-person interactions. Hybrid conferences or medical education events, on-line meetings, email and other digital channels have become an integral way for healthcare practitioners and industry to engage, and this trend is here to stay. Both parties can maximize their time and resources while maintaining contact.
- Enhanced engagement. A broader, omnichannel communications approach that combines various methods of interactions allows for both

rheumatologists and representatives to optimize and personalize engagement opportunities. This allows each interaction to be tailored to unique preferences and communication needs. An omnichannel approach also allows for a more seamless experience for health care providers, while simultaneously helping representatives create consistency and continuity, which contributes towards building strong, long-term relationships.

- Patient support programs (PSPs) matter. The pandemic emphasized the immense value of patient support programs for advanced therapies. Relationships between PSP personnel, the patient and their rheumatologist allowed for a continuous flow of information within the patient's circle of care. Even when clinics were closed, PSP personnel remained a consistent and trusted point of contact for both patients and rheumatologists, helping patients navigate their treatment journey.

If there's one thing that has remained the same over the last three years as it relates to the pharmaceutical industry-rheumatologist relationship, it is that it is an important, resilient one. The pandemic helped reinforce an integral aspect as to why these relationships exist, which is the well-being of patients. This renewed focus on patient-centric care has brought some transformative shifts in this space, bringing the ultimate goal back to the forefront: to improve outcomes, enhance quality of life, and empower those living with rheumatic conditions.

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