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5 Takeaways From AMCP's Annual Meeting

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Cost, biosimilars, and technology dominated the conversations when managed care pharmacists, health plan administrators, physicians, and more gathered for the AMCP Managed Care & Specialty Pharmacy Annual Meeting in San Francisco, April 19-22, 2016.

Here are 5 takeaways from the AMCP annual meeting.

1. Biosimiliars!

With only 2 biosimilars approved in the US, there is still a lot of uncertainty surround biosimilars, even as they garner a lot of excitement. There were 2 sessions focused on biosimilars at AMCP's annual meeting, plus these therapies were mentioned in multiple other sessions.

One of the issues surrounding biosimilars is that legal issues are delaying their launch, explained Aimee Tharaldson, senior clinical consultant of emerging therapeutics at Express Scripts. However, there is a lot of opportunity for biosimilars, with 56 patent expirations through 2020.

Doug Long, BS, MBA, vice president of industry relations at IMS Health, added that in 2016, the FDA should release guidance on biosimilar interchangeability and he expects more biosimilars to come.

2. The opioid epidemic is real.

With the CDC labeling prescription drug abuse in the US an epidemic, AMCP placed attention on the issue with a session that highlighted treatment options and pending legislation. Importantly, 80% of people who abuse heroin started with a prescribed pill.

Although, more people in the US die from addiction than from motor vehicle accidents, there are only 3 FDA-approved medications to treat and challenges with patient access to these treatments, said Kelly J. Clark, MD, MBA, president elect of the American Society of Addiction Medicine.

She added that there needs to be a shift in how people view addiction, which is not a moral failing as once thought, but a chronic brain disease that should be treated the way other chronic conditions are.

3. Attention is on digital health solutions.
Increasing patient demand and a healthcare system that is more reactive than proactive have necessitated digital innovations to treat patients.

In a pre-meeting session, speakers from Genentech, Intel, and Omada Health outlined how they use technology to prevent diseases, education patients, and analyze large amounts of data.

In addition, Yoona Kim, PharmD, PhD, head of clinical modeling and analysis with Proteus Digital Health, outlined the uses of personal health tools like wearables and smartphone apps and how technology can even capture behavioral data, like medication adherence,

4. More breakthrough therapies and orphan drugs expected.
During the pre-meeting program, Phil Hagerman, RPh, CEO and chairman of Diplomat Pharmacy, said that he expects to see more breakthrough, orphan, and priority review designations to bring drugs to the market at an even faster rate. He added that oncology and orphan drugs are driving the market and that oncology accounts for close to 50% of the dugs currently in development.

Dr Tharaldson also noted the increase in oncology and orphan drugs and that some of these therapies will be receiving breakthrough therapy designations.

5. Cost is always top of mind.
During a pre-meeting session, Steve Miller, MD, senior vice president and chief medical officer of Express Scripts, explained that new drugs are great because they are better and provide the ability to treat patients who couldn't be treated before; however, the cost of these drugs is unsustainable.

John Watkins, PharmD, MPH, BCPS Premera Blue Cross, said in his session on paying for cure that the high costs threaten to undermine the US economy.

And while biosimilars are expected to provide a lower-cost alternative, Dr Tharaldson said in her session that initially biosimilars will act more like competitors, so their discounts may not be that steep.