



The Benefits of Optimizing E-prescribing



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By R. Darren Williams, CPhT

Digital technology is transforming the healthcare industry, and medication dispensing is no exception. Despite the benefits and availability of digital tools, medical providers as well as pharmacies still rely on handwritten and/or faxed prescriptions, but the number of "hard copy" prescriptions is decreasing annually.

According to **Becker's Hospital Review**, in 2018, roughly 77% of all prescriptions were delivered electronically- up from 73% in 2016. However, dermatologists were not among the top five medical specialties utilizing e-prescriptions. E-prescribing was led by five medical specialties:

- Oncology (84%)
- Sports medicine (82%)
- Nephrology (80%)
- Cardiology (80%)
- Family medicine (79%)

The top three benefits of e-prescribing are universal. However, let's take a look at how optimizing e-prescribing provides unique benefits to the health of a dermatology practice and its patients.



1. Accuracy: Interpreting the handwriting of the prescriber is an obvious risk to the pharmacy accurately filling the prescription, and an e-prescription mitigates this risk entirely. A review of multiple studies by the **National Institute of Health (NIH)** reported error rates decreasing from 43% to under 7% within one year of e-prescribing implementation, increasing safety and more.

For a dermatology patient, a prescription error could negatively impact therapy success and lead to dissatisfaction and lack of confidence in the dermatologist. According to a **2018 survey**, 91% of dermatology patients stated their skin condition impacted their daily lives and half of those further stated their skin condition caused sadness and missed activities. If a prescription is filled for the incorrect medicine, dose, etc., therapy success is negatively impacted, and the patient may understandably blame the dermatologist, resulting in patient dissatisfaction and/or negative online reviews and word-of-mouth.

2. Adherence: **JAMA Dermatology** published a 2016 study showing the impact of e-prescribing on dermatology therapy adherence. The study, conducted by **University of North Carolina School of Medicine**, found a 16% reduction in nonadherence when the prescription was in electronic format compared with a paper prescription.

Add point-of-care dispensing (aka in-office dispensing) to the dermatology practice and utilize e-prescribing, and adherence improves 60-70%, according to the **New England Journal of Medicine**. Dispensing the prescription in the provider's office eliminates a second stop for the patient at a pharmacy and ensures he/she leaves the office with medication in-hand, beginning the prescribed treatment immediately.

3. Efficiency: Multiple studies have captured the amount of time and/or money spent managing calls and faxes to and from pharmacies — as much as an average of \$30,000 annually. E-prescribing reduces these back-and-forth communications, as information is clearly communicated with no need for interpretation of the prescriber's handwriting; in addition, the risk of the patient losing the written prescription and having the pharmacy call the dermatologist's office for it is also eliminated.

Again, when e-prescribing and in-office dispensing are combined, this benefit is optimized. With in-office dispensing, the dermatologist now has a "prescription help desk" and gains immediate visibility to the patient's prescription drug coverage, co-pays, etc., enabling formulary changes on-the-spot and eliminating unnecessary calls to and from the retail pharmacy.

Digital innovation in healthcare is presenting multiple opportunities to improve the health of a dermatology practice and its patients. While investments in electronic solutions to support practice operations may not be as alluring as purchasing new procedure-focused equipment, the ability to optimize the monetary and nonmonetary return-on-investment (ROI) for your practice and your patients is more immediate and long-term. And, finding practice operations solutions partners that can help identify the optimal combination of digital solutions is key to recognizing and maximizing that ROI. ■

