

run leadership and operational excellence

Doctor Drugstore

Walgreens is using advanced analytics to provide holistic healthcare at in-store clinics **BY MARY K. PRATT**

Clinicians at Walgreens in-store health clinics are using big data to augment conventional medical tools for patient checkups, in order to better assess each patient's condition and provide recommendations. The goal is to treat patients' immediate needs—that is, the concerns that brought them to the clinic in the first place—as well as to deliver a holistic medical experience that can increase the patient's overall health and avoid future medical costs. "The ability to deliver advanced analytics at the point of care can help identify and resolve gaps in quality of care," says Heather Helle, who oversees more than 400 clinics as COO of Walgreens' clinics division.

Heather Helle, COO of Walgreens' clinics division, says analytics can help Walgreens personalize health-care visits for walk-in patients and provide more complete care.



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In-store clinics are a big deal for Walgreens, whose CEO Greg Wasson tells financial analysts the company wants “to play a central role in emerging care models.” Walgreens also runs health centers at large companies that want on-site care for employees. Last year, Walgreens started to deploy Inovalon’s Electronic Patient Assessment Solution Suite (ePASS), a Web-based decision-support system that includes medical data and the tools to analyze it.

The suite includes data provided by health insurance companies and offers access to a registry containing information culled from 7.5 billion medical events involving more than 100 million individuals. The data includes demographics, enrollment, diagnoses, procedures, pharmacy information and laboratory results from commercial, Medicare, and Medicaid managed-care plan members. Hundreds of health plans in the U.S. and Puerto Rico are part of the system, which handles more than 140 million insured members, 540,000 physicians and 220 clinical facilities, according to Inovalon.

Checking Up On You

When a patient from any of the health insurers that partner with Inovalon seeks care at a Walgreens clinic, ePASS analyzes aggregated data and gives the clinician details about the patient’s conditions, treatment history and any missing elements. For example, the software can identify that a patient is overdue for a routine screen-

ing or hasn’t filled a prescription. The system alerts the clinician to these gaps so she can make recommendations to the patient right then and there.

“It can provide a very, very specific encounter for that patient,” Helle says.

In contrast, a clinician treating a patient whose records aren’t part of the system would have to take a detailed oral history. Even then, the clinicians couldn’t know about possible missed screenings or unfilled prescriptions.

Cynthia Burghard, a research director at IDC Health Insights, says Walgreens clinicians should be able to get insights through ePASS that they couldn’t get without analytics. But point-of-care analytics is a young field, Burghard says, and it’s too early to determine how much analytics can improve patient health.

However, Burghard says, ePASS could set Walgreens apart from its competitors. CVS runs in-store clinics, and Rite-Aid has launched online clinics via kiosks in some of its stores. If insurers see that Walgreens can produce good healthcare outcomes at lower costs, they may direct their members there, she says, to help keep overall costs in check.

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