

The Autoimmune Specialty Medication Journey: A Pharmacy Team's Role in Access and Adherence

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Pharmacy Forward: Advancing Practice for a
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Disclosure Statement

- Adrean Jones and Brooke Powell have no relevant financial relationship(s) with ineligible companies to disclose.
and
- None of the planners for this activity have relevant financial relationships with ineligible companies to disclose.



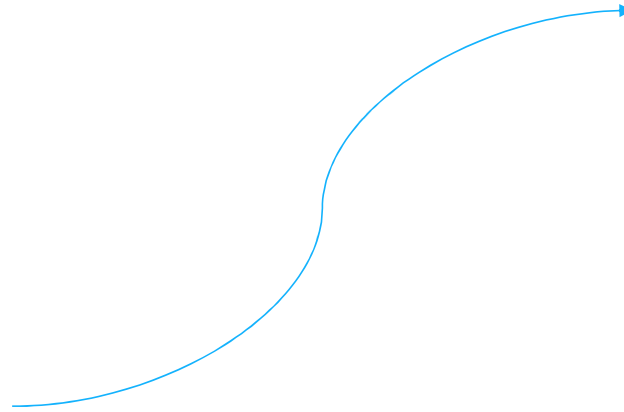


Learning Objectives

At the completion of this activity, the participant will be able to:

1. Identify high-alert characteristics and critical storage and handling requirements for common biologic and specialty medications used to treat autoimmune disorders.
2. Recognize common insurance, prior authorization, and specialty pharmacy barriers associated with immunosuppressive therapies and communicate effectively with prescribers to minimize delays in treatment.
3. Explain the importance of adherence monitoring and documentation for patients on chronic autoimmune therapy, including proactive refill management and coordination of specialty medication delivery.
4. Demonstrate empathy-based support strategies that enhance patient engagement and care for individuals managing the physical and emotional impacts of autoimmune treatment.

2004 the Step-Up Era



“Dead End” – PA Denial

- Incomplete clinical notes or missing information requests that stall the process.
- Insurance requires three other medication trials before they will pay for the one the provider ordered.
- Peer-to-Peer when the provider must call the insurance company to argue for the patient’s life.



“Paywall” – Financial Barriers



- Initial Sticker Shock- \$2,000+ copay conversation.
- Deductible Barrier – Patient’s facing their entire annual out-of-pocket maximum in January.
- Safety Net
 - Manufacture copay cards
 - Foundation grants
 - Patient assistant programs

“Hedge” – Benefits Investigation

- Which way? Does this drug go through the patient’s prescription card or their medical insurance?
- “White Bagging” vs. “Brown Bagging” Logistical nightmare of where the drug is shipped and who is allowed to touch it.
- The Out-of-Network Trap – Finding out too late that the specialty pharmacy isn’t preferred and you must start the maze all over.



“Exit Strategy” – The First Dose



- First Dose Phobia – Anxiety regarding self-injection or infusion.
- Waiting Game – Managing expectations that auto immune relief isn't instant.
- Clinical education – Injection technique, site rotation, storage, red flags.

It's a Long Game

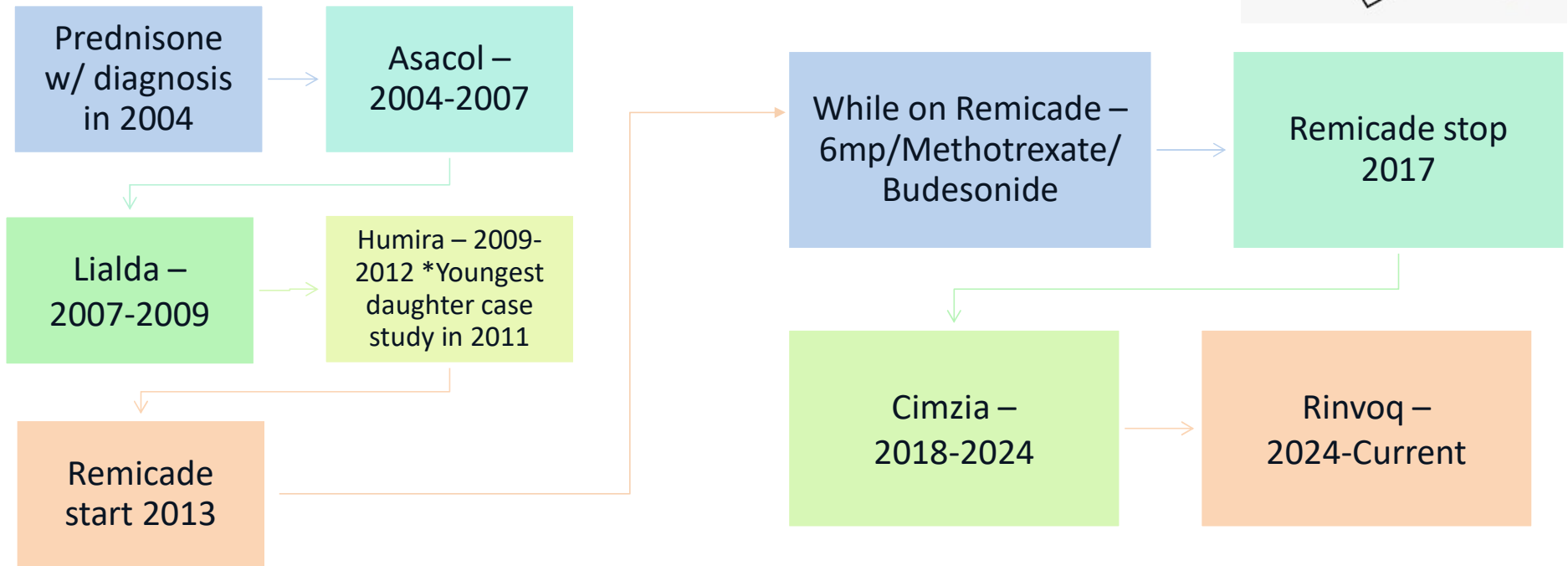
Staying on Track

- Secondary Non-Adherence – “I’m Cured” or when they don’t feel anything, “It’s not working.”
- Annual Maze – Re-Authorization, the stress of proving to your insurance yearly that you still need the medication.
- Treatment Fatigue – Being a ‘patient’ forever.
- Wellness Check – Pharmacy led clinical assessment.

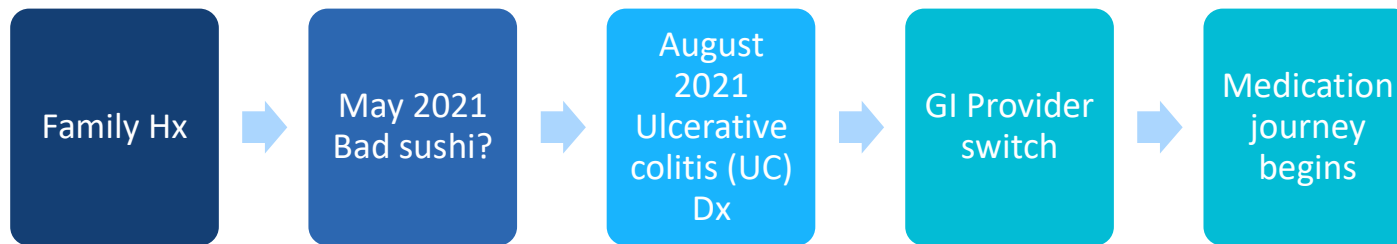




My Medication Journey

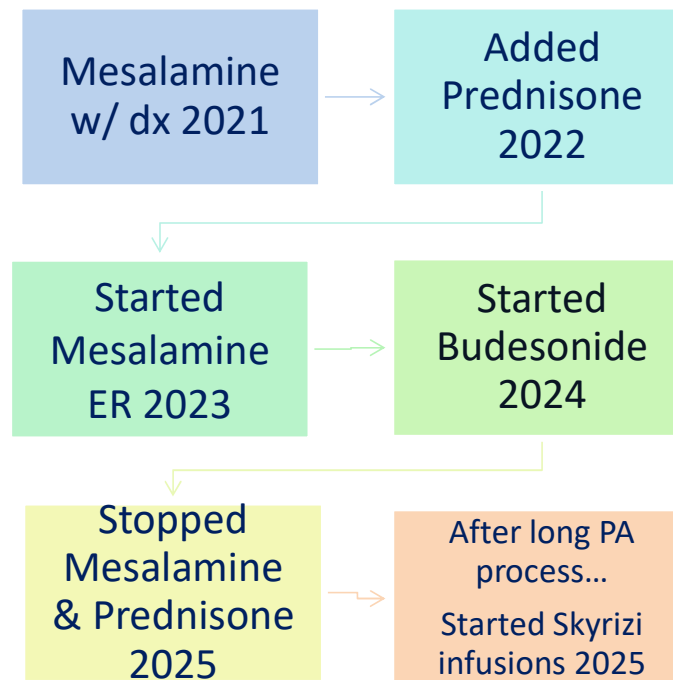


Newer Player to the Game



My Medication Journey

You meet one patient with Crohn's or UC;
you've met one patient with Crohn's or UC.



“I’m in the industry and I can’t get my meds.”



Patient Empowerment in Autoimmune Care

- Advocate for yourself
- Ask questions — no question is “too small”
- Understand the range of your disease
- Know your medication/treatment timeline
- Recognize potential mental health impacts
- Join support groups available locally or virtually
- Be open & honest with your employer about needs/accommodations

Pharmacy Technician + Patient Perspective:

“As both a tech and a patient, I’ve learned that informed patients experience fewer delays and better outcomes.”

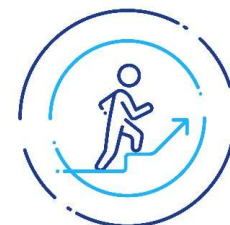


Insurance & Prior Authorization Navigation: Recognizing & Minimizing Barriers

- Educate yourself on insurance coverage & PA policies
- Gather contact information for care team (e.g., providers, specialty pharmacy, insurance)
- Financial assistance options (e.g., manufacturer copay cards, foundations)
- Telephonic disease/medication management programs from manufacturers
 - Start with nurse case manager
 - Transition to patient-experience specialist
 - Access to insurance specialist team
- Be proactive about denials and appeals

Tech Insight:

“As a pharmacy technician, I see delays happen daily. Clear documentation and quick follow-up help prevent treatment gaps.”



Specialty Medication Awareness: Storage, Handling & Safety

- Understand medication storage requirements (e.g., refrigeration, light protection, stability limits, etc.)
- Avoid temperature excursions during transport
- Timely refill and delivery to dose on schedule
- Never shake biologics unless directed
- Proper sharps disposal
- Additional immunizations may be required before/during therapy
- Schedule and complete labs routinely

Tech Insight: “Many biologics are high-alert medications. A missed dose or improper storage can be a costly impact efficacy and safety.”



Adherence & Documentation Strategies: Monitoring & Refill Coordination

- Keep an eye on your refills; don't wait until you're out to call
- Proactively schedule specialty medication deliveries
- Use medication/manufacturer apps to document and review:
 - Dosage dates
 - Appointment dates
 - Symptoms/Side effects
 - Lab results
 - Medication details and safety information
- Comply with treatment plan — even the “scary next steps”
- Coordinate labs with dosing schedule

Tech Insight:

“Adherence is more than taking medication. It's tracking, documenting, and anticipating needs.”



Whole-Person Management

- Get screened as recommended (with or without a dx)
- Educate yourself on your family history
- Dietary considerations & modifications
- Microbiome awareness
- Vitamins & supplements (check for contraindications)
- Monitor mental health changes & challenges

Tech Insight:

“I’ve learned autoimmune care is not just about injections — it’s about lifestyle, monitoring, and prevention.”



The Power of Your Pharmacy Team: Empathy-Based Support

- Befriend your local pharmacist & add your specialty pharmacy phone number to your contacts
- Ask your pharmacy technician for clarification
- Communicate side effects and changes in symptoms early
- Share emotional concerns, not just physical ones
- Engage with support programs
- Remember: You are not “non-compliant”; barriers exist and so does resolution

Empathy Perspective:

“As a technician and patient, I know how overwhelming this journey can feel. Compassion, clarity, and coordination make all the difference.”



Questions



Need More Information?

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