



POINT OF VIEW

Chatbots: 3 Opportunities to Support Patients in Pharma



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As machine learning has advanced, chatbots have become more integrated into our daily lives. While the regulatory issues in healthcare require careful consideration of any emerging tactic, the convenience that these tools can offer to users while moving them along their journey is driving many brands in pharma to take a closer look.

One of the most significant improvements in the underlying technology that is powering chatbots is the shift from a rule-based artificial intelligence (AI) to full, natural language processing implementation. Whether part of a website or an app, these tools can now perform more useful tasks than simply answering specific questions according to a defined set of rules. In fact, chatbots are now leveraging technology that is more in tune with how we speak and how we are used to interacting.

There are also different forms that chatbots can take, from the recognizable pop-up window within a website to a more immersive experience within an app. Examples in healthcare include “[Sophia](#),” the Novo Nordisk Cornerstones 4 Care website chatbot that provides information about diabetes and diabetes management, to “[Alia](#),” the Facebook Messenger app chatbot assistant from Pfizer that provides patients information around skin disease.

As chatbots continue to evolve, they are showing greater potential for pharma companies looking to provide a source of guidance to patients. By properly leveraging the power of AI, these tools are able to make patients’ lives a little easier. Below we’ve highlighted **3 specific ways chatbots can guide patients in their search for answers** about symptoms, navigating the complexities of therapies or treatments, or figuring out how to make sense of all the logistics required to get a prescription.



Condition assessment tool to drive patients to speak with a doctor

For a patient who is concerned about potential symptoms or already on treatment, certain types of questions could be asked from a chatbot to signal if and when a patient would benefit from a conversation or a visit to their HCP. As natural language processing capabilities from chatbots have improved, chatbots can make assessments on different aspects of a patient’s condition, including severity.

The chatbot can be programmed in such a way that it asks a series of questions according to a patient’s input. For example, if a patient is seeing a flare up of a skin condition, the chatbot can ask specific questions about it, and then recommend that the patient reach out to their HCP to talk about treatment options. The chatbot can also advise on the urgency of information provided, differentiating a mild case from one that is more severe and may require immediate attention.



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Quick search functionality to help patients find information on a website

Healthcare marketers understand the difficulty, but importance, of providing the right amount of context. It is often a constant balance between getting patients as much information as possible in a timely manner while also being sure to not overwhelm patients.

Chatbots are a great way to help a patient navigate a website more efficiently. For example, if a patient is looking to understand side effects or drug-to-drug interactions, a chatbot could quickly direct them to those sections instead of them having to find their way through a complicated navigation menu. This can help with the overall experience as the patient feels empowered to take advantage of the right content when needed.

Logistics “concierge” to streamline the access and fulfillment process

Treatment fulfillment and logistics often seem like daunting tasks for some patients, especially when dealing with unfamiliar entities such as a specialty pharmacy or prior authorizations. A chatbot can be a helpful support tool to answer questions at these logistical steps and serve as a concierge to make patients feel as though they have a partner working alongside them to navigate the complex fulfillment processes.

Through natural language processing, a chatbot can understand if a patient is struggling to find information on prior authorization or prescription processing. The chatbot could also be programmed to provide answers on formulary coverage. For some, accessing this information through a chat function could be much easier than having to deal with a number of different entities over the phone or in person.

As the examples above demonstrate, chatbots are a great tool to leverage in order to address many of the issues patients face on a daily basis. In addition to these patient-focused examples, marketers are also exploring a myriad of opportunities to leverage chatbots within an HCP setting, such as quickly accessing specific product information, connecting with a rep, or even for clinical trial recruitment management and coordination.

As with any new technology, it is important to bring in medical/legal/regulatory (MLR) review teams early and often to evaluate the implementation of a chatbot. **By leveraging content and information that has already been developed for the brand, you can help your MLR team become more comfortable with a chatbot on a site that has already been approved and in market.** This step is crucial toward a smooth implementation.

The Evoke AI Center of Excellence helps pharmaceutical and healthcare marketers discover how to best leverage AI-enabled technologies like chatbots to improve experiences and build deeper customer relationships. Our approach begins with an audit to identify the white space where something like a chatbot can make the most positive impact. To learn more, contact business@evokegroup.com.