

5 Creative Ways to Support Advanced Practice Providers (APPs) during the Era of COVID-19

Merkle Leadership Series

By: Jay Levenson, RNSights and Croom Lawrence, Merkle Health
April 21, 2020

Why Read This Report

You need to know of changes that affect a growing and important prescriber group in the HCP market – the 430,000 Nurse Practitioners (NPs) and Physician Assistants (PAs) referred to as advanced practice providers (APPs). While MDs are often disease-oriented, APPs are extremely patient-oriented and provide more patient education. These and other differences between physicians and APPs mean pharma marketers must develop a separate APP communication strategy and adapt to specific changes in the APP market caused by the pandemic.

- The autonomy of NPs/PAs has increased dramatically over the past decade, but the pandemic has caused new accelerating independence in making care and treatment decisions.
- NPs/PAs are navigating how to conduct an unprecedented amount of telehealth visits, some of whom are using virtual visits for the first time.
- NPs/PAs are understandably experiencing an increase in concerns for medical equipment shortages as well as the health of themselves and their families.

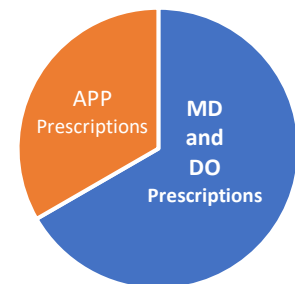


In this article we recommend ways to adjust to the changing APP market. If done correctly, showing support to NPs/PAs at a difficult time can build long-lasting relationships.

The Expanding Roles of NPs/PAs During the COVID-19 Crisis

The pandemic impacts where and how NPs/PAs are working. For example, in the COVID-19 response, one state began allowing PAs to prescribe all Schedule II controlled meds and removed chart co-signature requirements. Federal legislation, signed into law on March 27th, also permanently authorizes PAs and NPs to order home healthcare services for Medicare patients. Even prior to the pandemic, many states had maximized APPs' autonomy by removing barriers and **allowing NPs/PAs to make independent decisions** at the same level as physicians, to prescribe and to practice without oversight:

- In 2020, NPs/PAs make up one out of every three providers who can diagnose, prescribe, and treat patients in all settings with acute and chronic illness.
- Today, APPs see over 1.2 billion patients annually.
- 3 out of 5 APPs see their own distinct set of patients.
- Evidence shows APPs prescribe more frequently than MDs for some drugs and therapeutic areas as well as during e-visits.



- APPs sit on purchasing committees and use medical equipment as frequently as MDs.

Adjust to Telehealth and Limited Travel with Digital Marketing

Within the last month, the corona virus has caused telehealth and virtual visits to increase dramatically to unprecedented levels. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), passed in late March, expands access to telehealth visits with NPs, PAs or MDs for new patients by removing the restriction that the patient must have with a prior established relationship with the provider. Even prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, 87% of NPs were involved in some level of virtual visits and non-face-to-face patient encounters such as email, phone, video and text. In a survey of 189 NPs at the 2016 AANP annual conference, when queried about the percentage of their workday spent in telehealth:

- 21.6% spent between 40-60% of the day
- 6.4% spent over 75% of their day
- 12.6% spent no time

In another study, authors found “in most Tele-ICUs the APP role is similar to that of the physician in the Tele-ICU setting by having oversight of patient care management.” NPs/PAs are well known for their expertise in the patient journey and for their listening skills. This makes them well-suited to handle telehealth visits during which clear communication is even more essential.



Pro Tip: The pandemic has accelerated this trend in APP autonomy and pushed through some of the remaining barriers to full NP/PA practice authority. This means that pharma and medical device companies need to adjust their strategies and budgets accordingly to align with the expanding APP market.



There is evidence that patients feel more comfortable seeking help via telemedicine apps with certain ailments of a more sensitive nature such as digestive and mental health, so healthcare marketing shouldn't slow during a time of increased telehealth but rather adapt to the new landscape. With restricted travel, consider adjusting your HCP marketing strategy to add more digital to your mix, and re-evaluate if you are effectively reaching the right NPs/PAs. These shifts in NP/PA behavior present an opportunity for pharma and medical device marketers to influence treatment selection at the point of care and ensure patients can effectively start and stay on treatment.

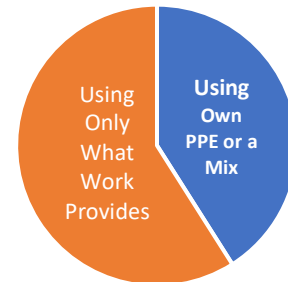
To reach and support APPs in a restricted travel environment, consider:

1. Programmatic marketing where your ads can be delivered to targeted APPs on telehealth software, websites, and online publications.
2. Messaging that speaks to the support you can provide. Examples include, microsites to answer HCP questions, patient resources that APPs might use when they can't meet with their patients face-to-face, tools and equipment such as tracking devices for vital signs, and smartphone apps for medical diagnostics.
3. KOL engagement through online webinars with no travel required. NP/PA audiences can interact with APP KOLs through live Q&A, and presentations can be hosted online for on-demand viewing by NPs/PAs nationwide.

4. Sales rep engagement through email and e-newsletter calls to action. NPs/PAs can click on an option that notifies the rep that they would like to be contacted. The CTA can also be set up to offer samples and educational material.

Align Your NP/PA Messaging with Their 2020 Concerns

The most important step for pharma and medical device marketers is to delve deeper into current NP/PA concerns – a topic you need to understand to be successful. NPs/PAs on the front lines in the COVID-19 response are understandably worried about medical equipment shortages – particularly personal protective equipment (PPE). Some NPs and PAs have contracted the virus while caring for COVID-19 patients – and a few have already died. APPs are also worried about bringing the invisible virus home to infect their families due to their frequent exposure. In an informal poll, 41% of APPs and nurses in the ER are using some combination of homemade masks or their own PPE; others are re-using N95 masks and equipment more than it was intended to be used. Despite the risky environment, Governor Cuomo announced March 25th that only 2,265 physicians compared to 3,346 APPs volunteered as part of New York’s surge healthcare force. APPs are proud of their contributions and lives saved, yet APPs are rarely acknowledged. They frequently feel forgotten and invisible among physicians and nurses who receive more of the press and accolades for their part of the battle against COVID-19. Now is the perfect time to communicate and build long-lasting relationships with APPs by showing your support and respect. Charitable acts and support, or simple appreciative messaging are highly valued by APPs who want and deserve respect.



Things to Do Right Now

To build long-lasting relationships with APPs in 2020’s challenging environment, consider:

1. **Corporate Branding** to show your company’s support and acknowledge the dedication and sacrifices of NPs/PAs nationwide. Respect is important to APPs. Because APPs don’t fit under the physician or nurse umbrella, they want to be recognized as a separate and important group in the patient journey. To have an impact, develop messaging and resources created specifically by and for NPs/PAs.
2. **Market research** to pinpoint actionable intelligence on the APP community within the specialty fields that matter to your brand. Online research is a cost-efficient way to quickly reveal which materials/tools APPs want in 2020; determine specific practice changes caused by the pandemic; and test which messages resonate the most. For the best result, partner with a company that specializes in NPs/PAs.

Conclusion

The role of APPs has seen significant changes over recent years, and the pandemic has and will likely continue to significantly alter and expand their roles and responsibilities. Increased tele-medicine, expanded authority and a desire to be recognized, all provide opportunity for pharma and medical device companies to engage with and influence this critical group of HCPs.

5 Ways Merkle and RNsights Can Help

1. Design and field primary research among NP/PA's and provide insights.
2. Develop and execute strategic plans for the APP market.
3. Update Corporate branding communications to speak authentically to this audience.
4. Create or guide your brand team's messaging to align with APP concerns.
5. Initiate digital tactics quickly to reach NPs/PAs in their greatest moments of need.

⊗ Caution	⊙ Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referring to APPs as Mid-Level • Assuming You Understand NPs/PAs • Using Messaging that Doesn't Align with APP Concerns • Not Adjusting Strategy and Budget for Growth in APP Market • Ignoring Telehealth • Resisting Change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnering with APP Experts • Increasing Digital Mix • Focusing on NPs/PAs with Plans to Build Lasting Relationships • Messaging that Shows Support and Respect to NPs/PAs • Adapting Quickly to the Changing Market • Market Research

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jay Levenson, Co-Founder of RNsights



Jay is the co-founder of RNsights, the leader in reaching NPs/PAs/RNs, and he is immersed in the world of Advanced Practice Providers (NPs and PAs). Jay's expertise is in helping pharma and medical device marketers effectively reach this important and growing prescriber segment. Contact Jay with any questions about marketing to Advanced Practice Providers.

Croom Lawrence, Vice President - Transformation and Customer Strategy



insights and data.

Croom is an agency leader in the transformation and customer strategy group at Merkle. He advises U.S. and global marketing organizations on brand leadership, digital transformation, and connected experience design to drive greater customer relevance and business performance. He helps Merkle clients align to a differentiated vision of automated, personalized, and predictive customer experiences. Croom seeks to inspire teams to see things differently, to affect behavior change, and to reshape the way businesses engage with their customers through an understanding of human

CLIENT SUPPORT

For more information please contact Jay Levenson at 978-684-2065 or JayL@RNights.com and Croom Lawrence at 540-878-6754 or cmlawrence@merkleinc.com