



# Anxiety Around Treatment Initiation Influences the Patient Experience

*Over 40% of patients in the PURE Patient Report experienced a significant level of stress at treatment initiation. From concerns regarding administration to side effects and efficacy, our diverse patient population surveyed had a number of similar anxieties. Fortunately, pharma companies can address the root causes of patient anxiety at treatment start by providing meaningful education and other emotional or logistical patient support services.*

The implications of treatment initiation can be quite broad, ranging from setting the right stage for proper adherence to decreasing the probabilities of side effects. Patient support programs that effectively address the concerns and pitfalls during therapy initiation sets their patients up for a more successful treatment journey.

**Introduction:** The PURE Report: Oncology 2020 surveyed 500 MDs and their support staff and found that therapy initiation was a common source of stress for patients, as over 40% of respondents mentioned in the Oncology study. This conclusion was further supported by our newest PURE report, where 300 patients were asked which milestones caused the most stress and similarly rated treatment initiation as a relatively high stress event. This paper will explore what characteristics of a medication may lead to a higher likelihood of stress around initiation, and how pharma can help.

Side Effect Profile: When patients were asked in our most recent PURE Patient report what one thing do they wish they were told by an HCP of their specialty medication, by far the most popular answer was side effects, ahead of other common topics such as affordability, etc. (see Figure 1)

There are 2 ways pharma can address this issue. The first is by offering patient friendly educational support around adverse events. This could be done by offering information through educational materials and patient educators or through referrals to advocacy groups.

The other strategy is to help build a stronger relationship between patients and their providers. HCPs will be best equipped to manage specific side effects and offer individualized support the closer they are to their patient.

Route of Administration (ROA): In particular, there are 2 ROAs that require an increased level of patient involvement that likely exacerbates treatment initiation anxiety: self-injectables and intravenous infusions

Patients tend to have many questions on whether or not they are injecting a drug properly. Medical jargon such as “subcutaneous” or “intramuscular” does not clearly translate to how a medication should be given in practice. However, explaining where on the body is best for administration, how quickly to depress the plunger, and for how long, is actionable information that can help a patient feel confident about taking a medication. Needle-phobia is another aspect to self-injectables that heightens anxiety; however, with proper training as described above, those fears may be allayed.

Intravenous infusion can also lead to high stress. Though a medical professional is now handling administration of the drug, other issues are setting expectations for the infusion experience & logistics.

Many patients simply do not have experience with, or any prior knowledge of, the infusion process. Understanding what an infusion center is, locating the right one, traveling there and knowing all the finer details once in the building are all questions that pharmaceutical companies should try to proactively address.

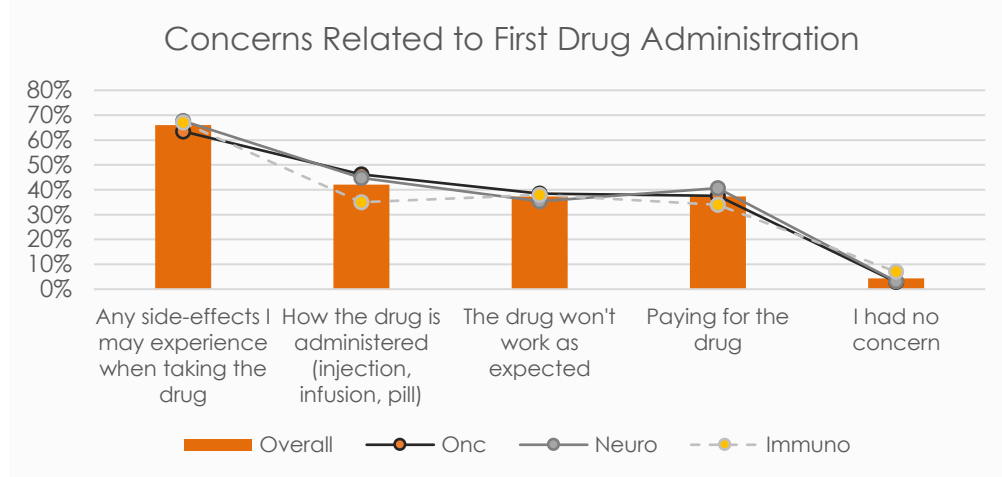


Figure 1. Responses by patients regarding concerns related to first dose (n=300). [PURE Patient Report 2021]

The therapies may be life-saving or quality-of-life changing medications for these patients. With such high consequences of administering correctly and comfortably, ensuring seamless onboarding to infused and injectable medications will be key.

**Expectations on Efficacy:** One of the most common types of patient anxieties centers around efficacy.

Patients may wonder how they will know a drug is actually working. For some diseases, the positive effect will be obvious, to the benefit of the patient and provider alike. On the other hand, there are many medications that work without any obvious and immediate signs. It is imperative to set the expectations on when and what patients should (or should not) expect on drug efficacy prior to starting the treatment. Pharma has an important role to play in the patient education in this situation.

**Call to Action:** Pharma is in a unique position to assuage the concerns of patients and caregivers at treatment initiation. Addressing education and access needs are two methods of easing stress.

Education about how a patient will take a medication, side effects, and drug efficacy are all critical ways pharma can ensure a smooth start to therapy. For new medications, patients, caregivers, and providers may rely heavily on the information pharma provides as they deliberate beginning a new therapy. And while accurate presentation of information is already paramount, emphasizing practically useful information that is easily understood need also be a priority. For example, explaining that anemia is a deficiency in red blood cells or of hemoglobin in the blood may increase a patient's knowledge on the disease, however,

explaining that anemia can cause fatigue or weakness helps them apply that knowledge to their own health.

Patients on specialty medications often have difficult-to-treat diseases. As they stress about their own health, their situations can be exacerbated when their medications require addressing logistical needs just to start therapy. Particularly in the case of infusion products or medications that require frequent monitoring, pharma will need to take an active role in easing the burden of these logistical issues. Solutions are highly dependent on the individual drug profile, but some include infusion and specialist locator tools or travel and lodging assistance.

**About the PURE Report:** This white paper focuses on just a small part of the broader PURE Report, an independent, syndicated study of patient and HCP satisfaction with manufacturers' patient support services, along with manufacturer rankings across 7 PURE indices in Oncology and Neurology (studies of other therapeutic areas are underway). The latest **PURE (Patient services Utilization, Recognition, and Experience) Report** was conducted at the end of 2020 with 300 patients across Oncology, Neurology, and Immunology.

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