

## CASE STUDY

# How Highlands Oncology expanded access to oral oncolytics treatment

Highlands Oncology Group has taken a proactive approach to meet the rising demand for oral oncolytics. Because of their in-house pharmacy, an improved patient workflow, and partnerships with regional hospitals, Highlands consolidated patient services such as education, medication pickup, and support programs to improve access to oral oncolytics care.

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**Published** – February 2026

**Read time** – 10 min

**Audience**

- Hospitals and health systems



# Overview

## The challenge

Oral oncolytics are emerging as a powerful tool for certain cancer treatments. As the region's only network of oncology facilities, Highlands Oncology Group (Highlands) quickly recognized the need to expand infrastructure and staff support to meet growing demand. The facility hoped to improve patient care, reduce avoidable visits to the emergency room, and prevent unwanted early discontinuation of oral oncolytics therapy.<sup>1</sup>

## The organization

Based in northwest Arkansas, Highlands Oncology Group is a 30-physician, 6-location cancer treatment center that provides patients with oncology care close to home. Four of those six locations have an in-house pharmacy that dispenses oral oncolytics.

## The approach

In their locations with pharmacies, Highlands consolidated patient services so patients could receive oncology care in the location closest to home, reducing the travel time needed for patient education, medication pickup, and social and financial support. Each in-house pharmacy dispenses limited access oral oncolytics not typically found in a community pharmacy. Oncology patients can visit a pharmacy to access medications and learn more about oral treatments. Highlands also partnered with area hospitals and other organizations to fill gaps in service for patients' unique needs. This "one-stop shop" approach is convenient for both patients and providers and has a positive impact on patient care, specifically patient adherence.

## The result

By creating a streamlined workflow for their in-house pharmacy and filling gaps in care, Highlands improved access to oral oncolytics care. Between 2024 and 2025, Highlands has served about 1,900 oral oncolytics patients and obtained funding and other assistance for 800.<sup>2</sup>



# Approach

## How Highlands created a one-stop shop for oral oncolytics treatment

To improve patient care, reduce avoidable ED visits, and help prevent early discontinuation of oral oncolytics, Highlands consolidated patient services in each of their six locations and developed an improved pharmacy workflow.

### The 3 elements

# 01

Map the patient journey to identify and address gaps in care

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# 02

Offer wrap-around services that match the needs of the patient population

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# 03

Collaborate regionally to help fill gaps in care

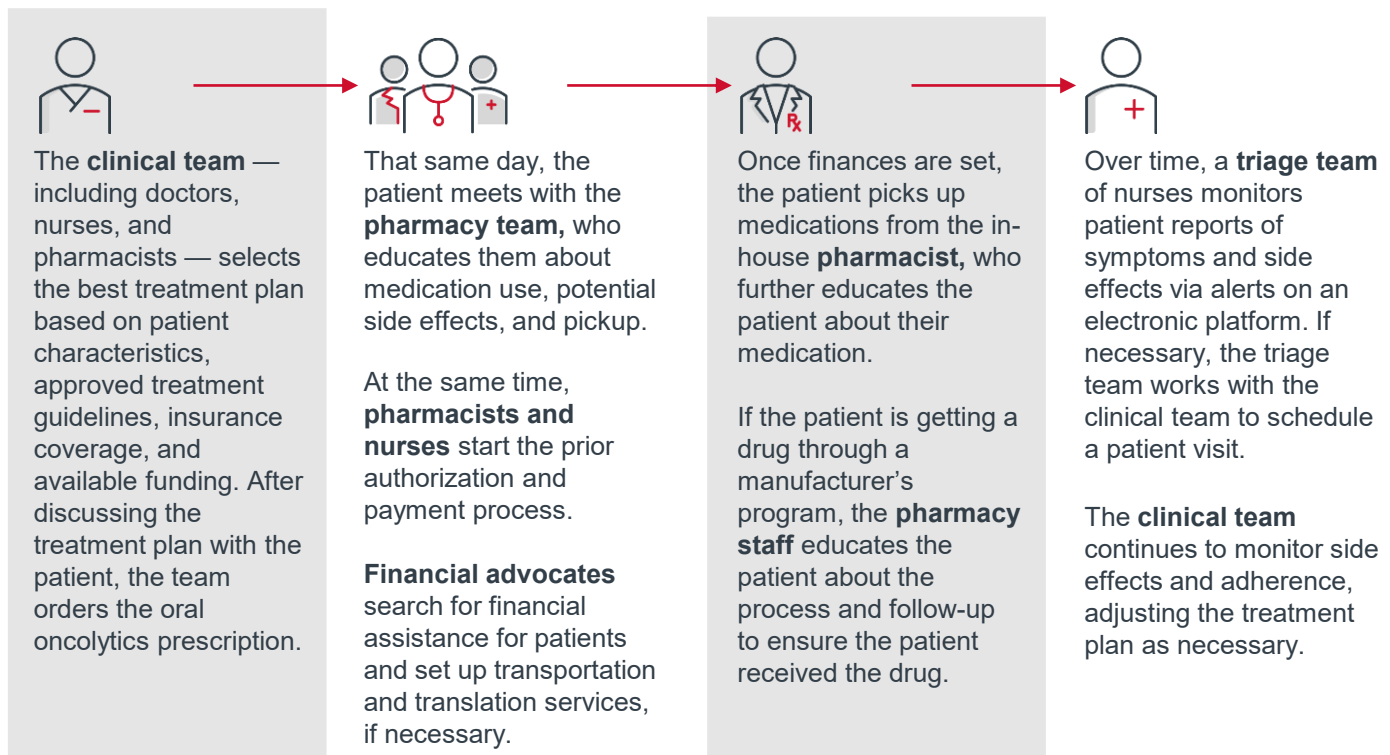
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# 01 Map the patient journey to identify and address gaps in care

Highlands Oncology started by mapping the patient journey, including which providers interact with patients at each stage of the care journey, the reason for each interaction, and the frequency of interactions. Using tacks and string on a board, leaders at Highlands marked each point in the patient experience within and outside their facility. Creating a visual representation of the patient journey allowed Highlands to identify when patients encountered each member of their cross-functional team — including pharmacists, financial advocates, providers, and triage nurses — pinpoint where patients were facing obstacles, and formulate solutions to address gaps in care.

As a result of these discussions, Highlands adjusted their in-house pharmacy workflow to create the smoothest patient experience possible. To achieve this, the clinical and pharmacy teams work together to educate patients, help with coverage and financing issues, and follow up to help manage symptoms and side effects when appropriate.

## Highlands Oncology Group's improved workflow for oral oncolytics



For example, to mitigate delays in the patient's first prescription fill, Highlands applies for prior authorizations and financial assistance immediately and coordinates closely with providers and patients about the process. The pharmacy works with manufacturers to explore approaches that may help patients begin therapy as quickly as possible.

Also, while the pharmacy doesn't ship prescriptions, pharmacists try to schedule prescription pickup on the same day as patient visits to reduce patient travel time.

Finally, in response to concern that patients might fall off the radar after receiving their prescriptions, Highlands now uses an interface that allows nurses on the triage team to monitor patients' concerns about symptoms and side effects from oral oncolytics. If a patient reports a concern, nurses contact them, track their symptoms, and refer the issue to the care team so the treatment plan can be adjusted, if necessary.

Highlands reported that the mapping process improved patient outcomes. In addition, it formed the basis of quality improvement projects that use real-world data to refine care strategies and allocate resources where they are most needed.

### Questions programs might ask themselves

- Which team members at your organization interact with patients?
- What locations within your facility will patients visit throughout their care journey?
- What technologies will patients use or need access to while on their care journey?

# 02 Offer wrap-around services that match the needs of the patient population

As the only oncology facility in the region, Highlands recognized the importance of facilitating patient access to care in ways that reflect the region and social drivers of health. In Highlands' case, patients were experiencing two obstacles that were significantly impacting their medication adherence and persistence.

First, some patients struggled to get to appointments due to a lack of transportation. In response, Highlands partnered with Hope Cancer Resources — a community-based nonprofit dedicated to providing wrap-around cancer support services in Arkansas — to provide complimentary transportation services for five of their six facilities. The service can help patients within a 50-mile radius attend appointments and access their medications, regardless of socioeconomic status. Hope Cancer Resources staff are also available at the hospital to help patients with other access to care issues.

Second, Highlands staff noticed that some Spanish-speaking patients — a large population within their community — faced a language barrier when communicating with their care teams. In response, Highlands invested in a team of translators to help providers communicate effectively with those patients.

Both services enable Highlands' patient population to access their cancer treatments and provide additional resources to support adherence. After investing in infrastructure and support services that target the unique needs of their population, Highlands reported improved health outcomes, reduced costs related to nonadherence, and increased health equity.

# 03 Collaborate regionally to help fill gaps in care

To encourage a seamless patient experience and coordinated treatment across healthcare providers and settings, Highlands partnered with area hospitals and nonprofits that could potentially help meet individual patient needs, improve patient access, boost outcomes, and align with broader health initiatives like value-based care.<sup>3</sup>

Highlands started by building relationships with the leaders of nearby hospitals and leveraging connections. For example, one large hospital system in the region had undertaken an approach to healthcare delivery that emphasized regional and local collaboration. When approached by the hospital system, the Highlands team decided to work closely with them to contribute to wrap-around care offerings for patients in northwest Arkansas. The oncology facility now partners with three hospitals in northwest Arkansas that are also integrated with Highlands' system. In addition, certain providers from other systems join the multidisciplinary teams at Highlands once per week to conduct rounds with the Highlands staff, helping to ensure patient needs are met.

Highlands works with external partners to provide mental health counseling and support groups, coordinate transportation to and from appointments, and secure grants and other funding<sup>2</sup> to support patients taking oral oncolytics, which are not always covered by insurance.

# Results

## Current state

Through their in-house pharmacy and updated workflow, Highlands Oncology Group focused on improving access to oral oncolytic medications and closing gaps in care.

60%

Of oral oncolytics prescribed were filled at Highlands in 2024<sup>4</sup>

1,900

Patients were triaged by the oral oncolytic team from August 2024 to August 2025

2,600

Prescriptions were triaged by the oral oncolytic team from August 2024 to August 2025

800

Grants and funding from patient assistance programs were obtained from August 2024 to August 2025<sup>2</sup>

## Looking to the future

In June 2025, Highlands received a 2025 Association of Cancer Care Centers (ACCC) Innovator Award for the creation of their remote patient monitoring model.<sup>5</sup> Over the next two years, Highlands hopes to further refine their scalable remote patient monitoring model. To enable this work, Highlands is focused on investigating which data is most helpful to identify care gaps and monitor the progress of their program.

## Endnotes

1. Unless otherwise noted, all information in this case study came from Advisory Board interviews with two officials from the Highland Oncology Group's leadership team.
2. Grants, funding, and other assistance obtained for patients are completely independent of Pfizer.
3. Southwick R. Planning to transform health care in Arkansas. *Chief Healthcare Executive*. February 10, 2025.
4. Highlands attempts to fill all oral oncolytic prescriptions, but transfers prescriptions when a patient's PBM prevents access to Highlands or the patient is getting the drug at no cost through a manufacturer-sponsored program.
5. Radwan R. Improving Care Between Clinic Visits: A Sustainable Model for Remote Patient Monitoring. Association of Cancer Care Centers. June 10, 2025.

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