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## **NASP Definitions of Specialty Pharmacy and Specialty Medications**

### **What is a Specialty Pharmacy?**

A specialty pharmacy is a state-licensed pharmacy that solely or largely provides only medications for people with serious health conditions requiring complex therapies. These include conditions such as cancer, hepatitis C, rheumatoid arthritis, HIV/AIDS, multiple sclerosis, cystic fibrosis, organ transplantation, human growth hormone deficiencies, and hemophilia and other bleeding disorders. In addition to being state-licensed and regulated, specialty pharmacies are accredited as a specialty pharmacy by an independent third party, nationally recognized accreditation organization such as URAC®, the Accreditation Commission for Health Care (ACHC), or the Joint Commission, in order to ensure consistent quality of care.

Specialty pharmacies connect patients who are severely ill with the medications that are prescribed for their conditions, provide the patient care services that are required for these medications, and support patients who are facing reimbursement challenges for these highly needed but also frequently costly medications.

Specialty medications have a complex profile that require intensive patient management. Some specialty medications also require special handling. Though some are taken orally, many of these medications need to be injected or infused, some in a doctor's office or hospital. Specialty pharmacies provide services that include training in how to use these medications, comprehensive treatment assessment, patient monitoring, and frequent communication with caregivers and the patient's physician or other healthcare providers.

The expert services that specialty pharmacies provide drive adherence and persistency, proper management of medication dosing and side effects and ensure appropriate medication use. The specialty pharmacy's patient-centric model is designed to provide a comprehensive and coordinated model of care for patients with chronic illnesses and complex medical conditions, achieve superior clinical and economic outcomes, and expedite patient access to care.

### **What is a Specialty Medication?**

Specialty drugs are more complex than most prescription medications and are used to treat patients with serious and often life-threatening conditions including cancer, hepatitis C, rheumatoid arthritis, HIV/AIDS, multiple sclerosis, cystic fibrosis, organ transplantation, human growth hormone deficiencies, hemophilia and other bleeding disorders. These medications may be taken orally but often must be injected or infused and may have special administration, storage and delivery requirements. Many of these injectable medications are self-administered in the patient's home. Infused specialty medications are administered in various treatment settings such as a patient's home with the support of a home health care professional, sometimes in a doctor's office or even in a hospital.

The complexity of these medications may be due to the drug itself, the way it is administered, the management of its side effect profile, the disease or condition it is used to treat, special access conditions required by the manufacturer, payer authorization or benefit requirements, patient financial hardship or any combination of these. As a result, patients being treated with specialty medications require comprehensive patient care, clinical management, and product support services.

Specialty prescription medications cannot be routinely dispensed at a typical retail community pharmacy because the therapy typically requires special handling as well as significant patient education regarding appropriate utilization. Typical retail pharmacies are not designed to provide the patient care or other services that specialty medications require.