



## **Answering the 3 Key Questions Pharma Must Consider When Deploying Field Reimbursement Managers (FRMs) at the Launch of a New Specialty Brand**

*This article addresses 3 key questions regarding the deployment of FRMs at the launch of a new specialty pharmaceutical brand:*

**What is the business case for including FRMs at launch?**

**What are the key differences between an FRM “buy-and-bill” team and an FRM “specialty pharmacy” team?**

**What are the steps to coordinate the FRM’s efforts with those of the Sales Rep and the Hub?**

## **Background and Introduction**

Field Reimbursement Managers (FRMs) are highly skilled professionals operating in a specialized non-sales role supporting healthcare professionals and office staff in defined territories. FRMs use their extensive knowledge of insurance coverage, patient assistance programs, and the local reimbursement landscape to provide one-on-one support throughout the reimbursement journey.

Despite their important role, some new-product brand teams are uncertain, or even doubtful, of the importance of deploying an FRM team at launch. This article addresses 3 key questions regarding the deployment of FRMs at the launch of a new specialty brand.

## **1) What Is the Business Case for Including FRMs at Launch?**

The foundation for building a business case to include FRMs at launch is to understand the typical patient medication journey during the brand’s launch phase. While the patient’s overall journey to successful therapy often began years earlier, the medication journey begins with the prescribing decision. And because most specialty brands are costly and include complexities of shipment, storage, and administration, payers erect an array of access hurdles. For both medical-benefit and pharmacy-benefit products, prescribers and patients typically face numerous access challenges, especially within the first 6 months of product launch:

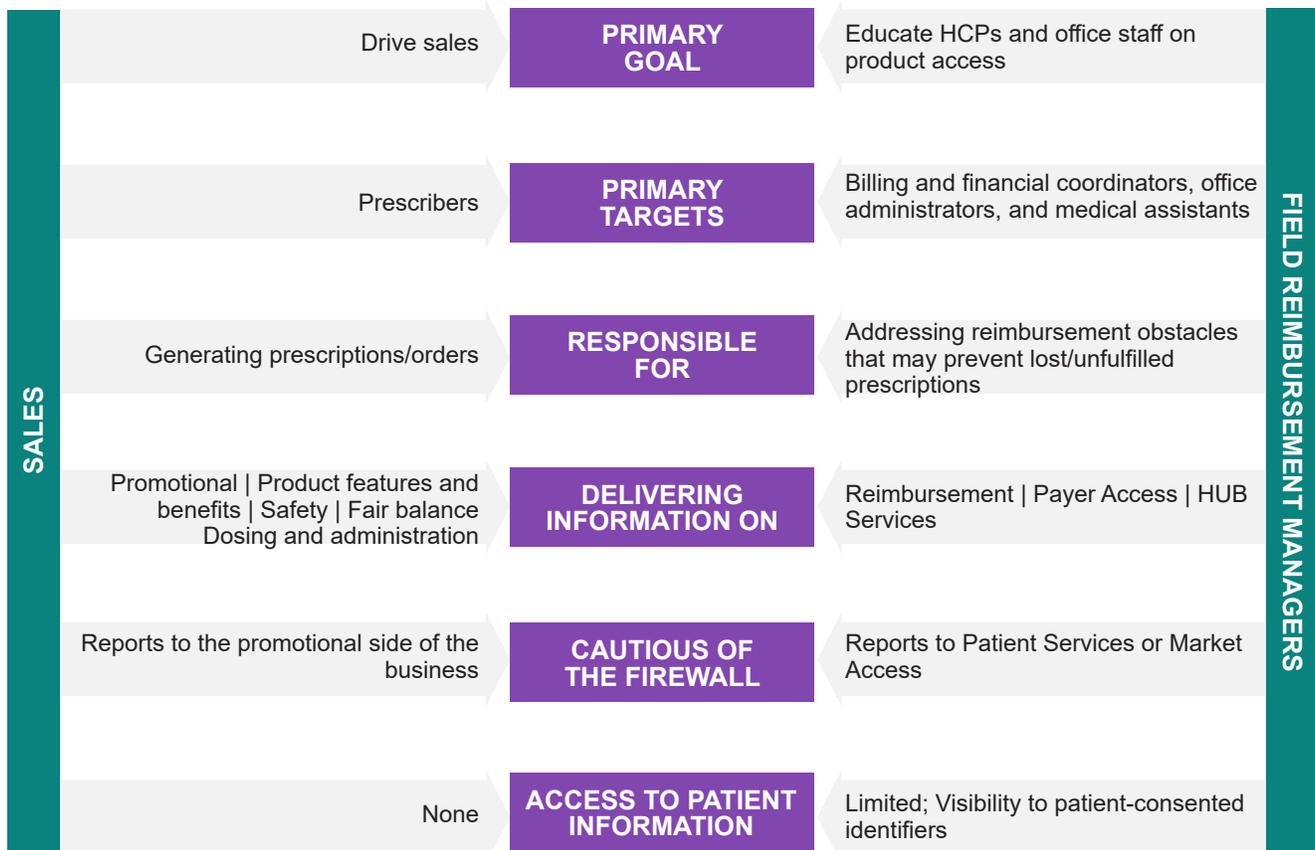
Medical exception requirements while payers establish coverage policies	NDC blocks, step therapy requirements, prior authorization hurdles, complicated appeals
High patient out-of-pocket costs, even when covered	Confusion in correct diagnosis coding requirements and changing product codes
Additional challenges of reverification, reauthorization, and adherence	

The goal is to get patients to a steady state of ongoing successful therapy. If every step is aligned perfectly, the typical launch specialty brand patient waits 10 to 12 business days to receive their first drug dose. However, the path is riddled with potholes along the way, each threatening to slow or even derail the process. Unfortunately, for almost 40% of patients, the wait for that first dose is 4 weeks or more. In addition, approximately 15% of patients can experience a 2- to 4-month delay, if they get the medicine at all. The FRM's job is to help smooth the access process for prescribers and patients, thereby minimizing time to therapy and boosting the number and percentage of patients reaching a steady state.

We are often asked, "Can't the sales team handle these access issues?" In most cases the answer is simply, "no." Specialty brands require a great deal of expertise to manage issues of payer policy, dosing restrictions, and step edits—especially at launch. And besides, sales reps need to be selling.

Figure 1 underscores the substantial distinctions between sales and FRM roles. Commercial leaders, of course, want sales reps to be driving prescription growth by educating prescribers on the disease state, features and benefits of the product, dosing, and perhaps high-level access and payer policy issues. The sales team reports to the promotional side of the business, far-removed from individual patient information.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Comparing Sales & Field Reimbursement Managers**





Conversely, the Field Reimbursement Manager's goal is to drive access by educating and working side by side with billing and financial coordinators, office administrators, and medical assistants. They focus on instruction on billing, prior authorization forms, and navigating any type of reimbursement obstacle. FRMs work with the Hub Team to remove the barriers and pitfalls. In addition, they can train prescribers on the peer-to-peer access process, in which the prescriber calls into the payer and speaks to the medical doctor there, describing the rationale, the clinical documentation, and the patient history.

Finally, many FRM teams these days have access to limited patient identifiable information. That's important when they're dealing with medical assistants and biologics coordinators at the office to make sure they're talking about the right patients to facilitate the process. And since they report to the market access function, they're partners with the compliance and legal teams and are comfortable handling detailed access issues. Ultimately, FRMs are there to pull through conversion, to decrease time to fill, and make sure patients stay on therapy.

In the end, our experience in deploying many FRM teams over the past 2/5/10 years has shown that brands benefit most from FRMs at launch. While it may seem prudent or cost-effective to delay deploying FRMs until the product gains momentum and the need becomes obvious, we have found this strategy to be a mistake. The first several months of launch are crucial. If patient access is routinely denied or delayed by payers and PBMs, both patients and prescribers become frustrated. Scripts are lost, momentum falters, morale declines, and the launch underperforms.

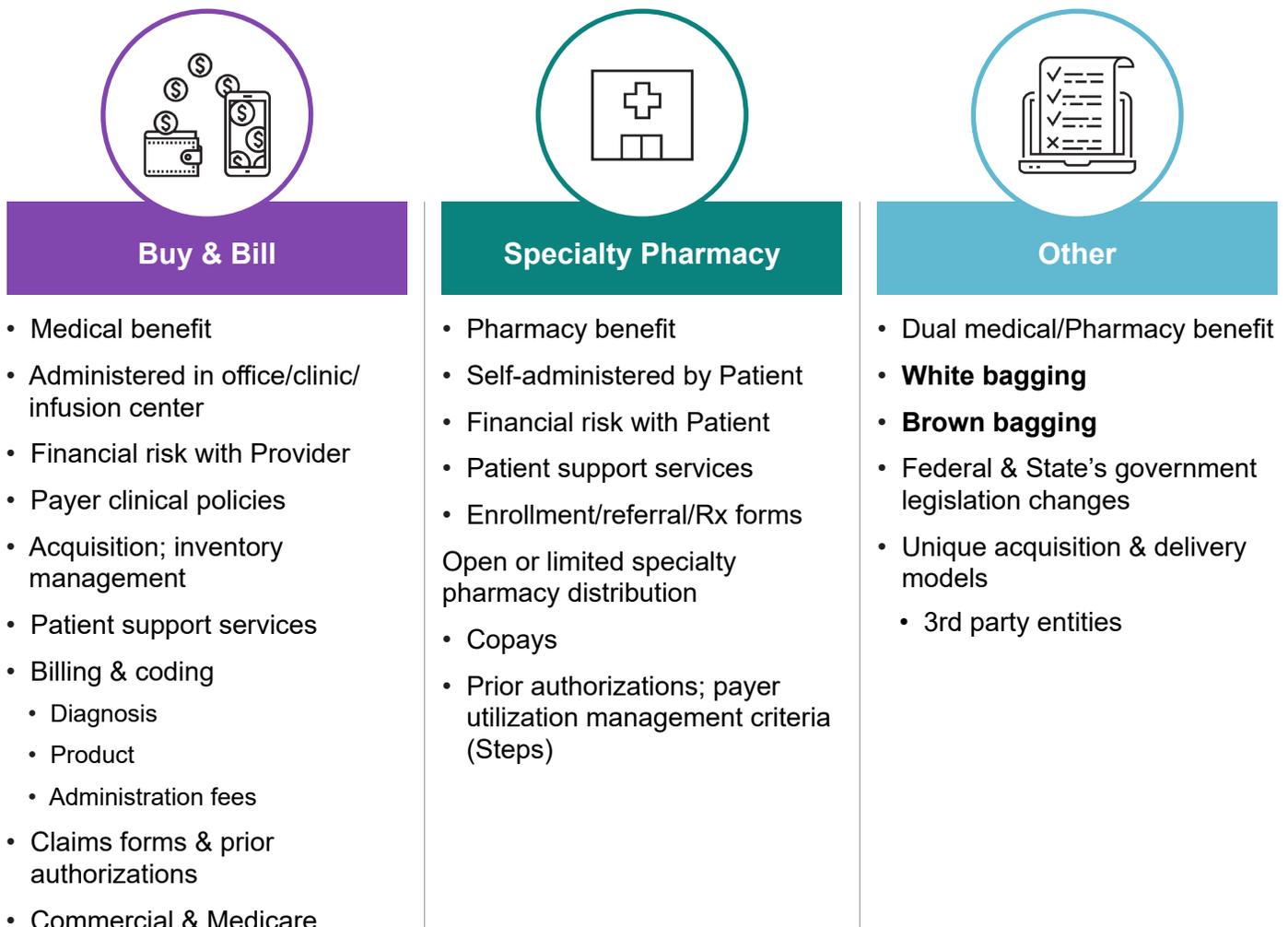
## 2) What Are the Key Differences Between an FRM “Buy-and-Bill” Team and an FRM “Specialty Pharmacy” Team?

In the past, FRMs were deployed almost exclusively by manufacturers of high-cost injectable biologics. These drugs are largely covered under the medical benefit and administered in physicians’ offices through a buy-and-bill process, where the healthcare provider purchases, stores, and administers the product, and then bills the payer for the cost of the drug plus an administration fee. In the buy-and-bill model, the financial risk lies with the purchaser, whether it is a healthcare professional individually or an institution.

Patient support services play a crucial role with buy-and-bill drugs, and the billing and coding is a particularly important piece. Buy-and-bill FRM teams fill numerous and important roles for clinicians and patients, as shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2

### Buy-and-Bill or Specialty Pharmacy Model considerations and changing landscape



### 3) What Are the Steps to Coordinate the FRM's Efforts with Those of the Sales Rep and the Hub?

Specialty pharmacy FRM teams have emerged over the past several years because an increasing number of specialty brands are now being covered under pharmacy benefits; many of these are injections self-administered by patients. Specialty pharmacies support the distribution and reimbursement for these brands. Importantly, in this model the financial risk lies with the patient rather than the office. However, as shown in Figure 2, the office has its own hurdles to clear. Enrollment forms are critical, copays can be a significant challenge, and prior authorizations are nearly universal. FRMs help office staff navigate all of these.

There are additional distribution models as well. Payers have implemented a “white-bagging” model, in which a Specialty Pharmacy ships the drug to the physician’s office for administration, but the office does not take legal ownership. Similarly, in “brown bagging,” the Specialty Pharmacy sends the drug to the patient, who then brings that product to the office for administration. In each of these models, it is the FRMs who stay up-to-date on all the details and can share updated information with their office customers.

### Specialty Product Launch - Team Responsibilities Matrix

		ACTIVITY								
		Comprehensive Training Science/Product/ Safety (pre-launch)	Account Profiling	Clinical Sales Presentation (launch & beyond)	PHI	High Level Patient Access Message	In-Depth Patient Access Issue Handling	Specialty Pharmacy Interactions	Conducts Benefits Investigation PA/Denials	Injection Training
ROLE	Sales Rep	✓	✓	✓		✓				
	FRM (Field Reimbursement Manager)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	* FRM informs only	
	HUB PSP Services	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	National/ Regional Accounts	✓		✓ Disease state & product profile decks						
	Medical Science Liaisons	✓		✓ Disease state & product profile decks						
	Nurse Educators	✓			✓					✓

## Additional Considerations

In addition to these 3 foundational questions, a brand team considering standing up an FRM team should consider a host of additional questions:

1. What does team sizing look like?
2. How will you deploy geographically?
3. What is the reporting structure?
4. Are these corporate-owned FTEs, or are you leveraging the services of a contract group that may have expertise in this area?
5. If you are building an internal team, how will you manage recruitment and training? What will your incentive compensation program look like? How will you evaluate people? How will you reward them for doing a great job? What type of career ladder would FRMs have?

## Final Thoughts

FRMs can serve a crucial role in the launch of a new specialty brand. First, they help establish meaningful relationships with prescribers and staff. Second, they support key patient-support office staff as they work to navigate the many access challenges faced by a new brand. Third, they can help a physician understand key access activities, including how to engage the peer-to-peer access process. All of these can be done at any time in a brand's life cycle, but they are most important at launch.

We often hear from companies a year into launch saying they wish they had deployed an FRM team immediately at launch. They recognize that they left business on the table. More important, patients who needed and deserved the product during that year did not get it. Opportunities lost.

Our experience shows that most of the people who enjoy the FRM role and are great at it at some point in their career had a sales background; they know how to engage customers. What's more, they're very focused, dedicated, and patient with the process. Above all, FRMs are passionate about their work. They enjoy problem-solving, and are willing to dig in to help one patient gain access to the medicine they so badly need. These are the untrainable but essential characteristics we select for when hiring an FRM team: patience, dedication, focus, and passion.

Amplity has a proven history of delivering high-quality field reimbursement teams that provide critical support through the reimbursement journey and help solve complex issues that may create patient access barriers. When you're ready to discuss how we can partner to create better healthcare solutions, contact us at: [www.amplity.com/contact-us/](http://www.amplity.com/contact-us/).