

## Episode #1 Transcript: The Great Impact: Patients, Physicians, Pharma—and COVID-19

### Introduction (00:00):

Encompass Communications and Learning is a full-service training and communications agency dedicated to helping life sciences teams enhance their skills and knowledge.

The thoughts expressed in this podcast are those of the speakers and not necessarily views of Encompass.

### Jim Gamgort (00:17):

Welcome to Encompass Insider. I'm Jim Gamgort, Managing Partner and Chief Commercial Officer here at Encompass.

### Mary Barlow (00:24):

And I'm Mary Barlow, Encompass's Senior Director of Media Production.

### Jim Gamgort (00:28):

During Encompass Insider, we talk about factors and trends impacting life sciences and potential solutions to address them. Today, we're here to discuss the great impact COVID-19 is having on patients, physicians, and pharmaceutical companies.

For those of you who don't know us, Mary and I are just two colleagues among a much larger and talented team.

### Mary Barlow (00:55):

Yes, a team much more talented than us, Jim.

### Jim Gamgort (00:57):

Fully agree. Our team at Encompass helps life sciences colleagues advance their skills and knowledge.

### Mary Barlow (01:03):

Jim, is it true you worked at a circus before coming here?

### Jim Gamgort (01:06):

That's funny, Mary. Yes, it feels like it sometimes, but in reality, I've spent over 25 years in the life sciences industry before joining Encompass. I spent some time at Johnson and Johnson, Merck Schering-Plough, the Medicines Company, as well as Alcresta Therapeutics, where I led marketing and sales, as well as market access. Here at Encompass, I head up marketing and new business development. Mary, is it true that you worked on a farm?

### Mary Barlow (01:31):



Well, I do like working outside, Jim, but actually, I spent more than 20 years working inside for Aetna and Blue Cross. And then another 10 in editorial roles with stakeholders across the healthcare system. Here at Encompass, I oversee the development of clinical, market access, and marketing communications.

Jim Gamgort (01:50):

Well, I know your team has been busy developing materials to help our customers in life sciences adapt to this new world we're in.

Mary Barlow (01:56):

Yes, we sure have, Jim.

Jim Gamgort (01:58):

What's happening now across healthcare is affecting every stakeholder in a major way. This includes, of course, patients and their providers, pharmaceutical and device makers, labs, health insurers, government payers, the PPE supply chain, and so on.

Mary Barlow (02:13):

So true. That's why I say what's happening now is having the greatest impact across healthcare since the Affordable Care Act was passed in 2010.

Jim Gamgort (02:22):

Absolutely, and we don't pretend to have all the answers. But discussing what's happening across the industry may help us gain a greater understanding about what solutions and support might be necessary.

Mary Barlow (02:33):

So true.

Jim Gamgort (02:34):

Alright, Mary, you go first. What have you and your team been seeing, starting with patients?

Mary Barlow (02:38):

So, starting with patients—and let's keep in mind that they are the most important stakeholder in healthcare. Everything should center around ensuring they're as safe and as healthy as possible.

Jim Gamgort (02:49):

Completely agree.

Mary Barlow (02:50):

And these days, the first thought that comes to mind is, obviously, the suffering; how we all know that many patients are trying to survive the disease, and to the great many families who've lost loved ones, we know it's been especially painful. Then, I think about the other challenges people are facing right now. Nearly 31 million filed for unemployment benefits in May,<sup>1</sup> and along with those jobs, many people lost health plans, too.

Jim Gamgort (03:16):

That places a tremendous amount of people in a vulnerable position.

Mary Barlow (03:19):

Yes, it does. When that happens, some families move to a spouse's plan. Some extend current plans through COBRA, which is expensive. Others purchase individual plans, or they can qualify for Medicaid.<sup>1</sup> However, not everyone has access to some other plan. Right now, it's estimated that about 5.4 million workers are newly uninsured, according to a credible report recently released by Families USA.

Jim Gamgort (03:47):

Yeah, absolutely, Mary. I read the loss of coverage today is even higher than what occurred during the last recession.<sup>2</sup>

Mary Barlow (03:53):

That's exactly right, Jim. It's the highest increase in the number of uninsured people in a single year. So, thinking about the pharmaceutical companies you mentioned earlier, this is the time when they have an opportunity to provide added patient support. And, I recognize that some of them are stepping up to do this.

Jim Gamgort (04:12):

Yeah. Some are providing new patient assistance programs that offer drugs at no cost, either across brands, or for patients with certain conditions, or to those that were impacted by the crisis.<sup>3</sup> Actions like these, and, of course, in addition to their efforts to develop treatments and vaccines, truly demonstrate their value to patients.

Mary Barlow (04:30):

Agreed. And when it comes to patient care, obviously early in the crisis, a significant number of patients delayed care when they could to avoid disease transmission. And in some cases, that's still the case. It's also no surprise that those who can are using telehealth for physician visits more than ever. And in some places, many patients are going back in to see their doctors in person again, while others are still seeing their doctors only through telehealth platforms, which is probably here to stay for now.

Jim Gamgort (05:00):

I agree. As a matter of fact, my family has used telehealth at least three times during this crisis. So, use of telehealth has increased significantly as now payers, providers, and patients try to avoid spreading the virus in those live care settings.<sup>4</sup>

Mary Barlow (05:13):

Yeah. Way back in the day, telehealth wasn't even covered by many health insurers. So, that's no longer the case.

Jim Gamgort (05:20):

That's right. Both physicians and administrators believe the new normal will include more remote patient visits, and in some cases, alternate sites of care.

Mary Barlow (05:28):

So, you mean triaging patients to different sites of care and thinking more strategically about the care settings in the future.<sup>5</sup>

Jim Gamgort (05:35):

Yeah, I do. I think they will have to, Mary. Like now, there are COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 care settings. In fact, we must all understand these evolutions, so we can support physicians and patients in this new normal.

Mary Barlow (05:48):

Yeah, I agree. So, coming back to these current circumstances, even though many patients may be returning to usual provider visits, those who delayed care—they never got diagnosed, so they were never prescribed the new prescriptions and the refills that they would have been.

Jim Gamgort (06:04):

That's true, and I believe there's three parts to this issue. For one, overall patient prescriptions from the most heavily prescribed drugs decreased compared with 2019.<sup>6</sup> In fact, we saw data from forecasters, like ZS Associates, who believe the prolonged COVID-19 crisis, like we're seeing, could potentially reduce overall prescription sales by over 50 billion, industry wide. Now, that obviously would be a loss to the industry, but think about the patients who, to your point, would not be getting the medications they need.

Mary Barlow (06:34):

Yeah, it's really hard to consider those numbers.

Jim Gamgort (06:37):

The second thing is that 90-day supplies of drugs, both from retail and mail order pharmacies, have been steadily increasing from earlier this year, as patients avoid frequent pharmacy trips.<sup>7</sup> In fact, we saw a huge spike in 90-day prescriptions in March. While we're not at those levels yet, right now, those 90-day prescriptions have grown. And then, third, prescription refills and new prescriptions are increasing from recent multi-week lows. Albeit, not at pre-COVID-19 levels yet.<sup>8</sup>

Mary Barlow (07:07):

So, it sounds like a lot of patients, at least earlier this year, may have gone without the drugs they needed.

Jim Gamgort (07:13):

Yes. And some may still be doing that.

Mary Barlow (07:15):

Not good. One positive bit of news I read, though, was that patient drug adherence is better than last year.

Jim Gamgort (07:21):

So, you mean that more patients than last year are taking their drugs as prescribed?

Mary Barlow (07:25):

Yeah, I guess staying home helps us to remember to take our medicines on time.<sup>9</sup>

Jim Gamgort (07:30):

Well, that makes sense. Alright, let's talk about providers and how they're faring through this crisis.

Mary Barlow (07:34):

Well, no doubt that, aside from patients suffering with the disease and families who have lost loved ones because of it, providers are experiencing the motherlode of challenges right now.

Jim Gamgort (07:46):

Yeah. I saw my physician recently and can truly appreciate the physical, mental, and financial impact that COVID-19 has on her office, from the protocols to enter the office to the PPE required and the new levels of disinfection. It's one heck of an undertaking. And there's no way that that is inexpensive.

Mary Barlow (08:04):

I agree, Jim. Is there anything that industry can do—let's say drug makers—to assist and make this easier on physicians?

Jim Gamgort (08:12):

Definitely. And the list is long.

Mary Barlow (08:14):

I've got time.

Jim Gamgort (08:15):

Alright. Pharma must first be equipped to support providers.

Mary Barlow (08:18):

This is where I think pharmaceutical and medical device representatives come into play.

Jim Gamgort (08:23):

Yes. They play a huge role to ensure physicians know the latest clinical data and treatment options available for their patients.

Mary Barlow (08:29):

And of course, most of them at this point are using virtual engagement platforms to stay connected with physicians—albeit, it's taking some time to get used to it.

Jim Gamgort (08:39):

Yes. And that engagement, Mary, is not the same across the board, and it's not happening as often as live engagement, but it is increasing. Representative visits were down over 50% earlier in the crisis, but

that's no longer the case. These figures have bounced back to over 80% since before the crisis due to this remote detailing. It varies of course, based on geographic regions, specialty, and depending upon whether physicians prefer live or virtual meetings or a combination of the two. And while there has been some success in virtual engagement, many find it difficult to even get through to set up a remote call with physicians to begin with.

Mary Barlow (09:14):

Yeah, I've heard that. And that's why a multichannel presence is accelerating at this point.<sup>10</sup>

Jim Gamgort (09:19):

That is a huge part of this. Pharma companies that offer a range of platforms to engage their customers are best positioned to succeed. This is why the skillset of what's now known as an industry rep must change for this more digital and dynamic environment.

Mary Barlow (09:34):

Yeah. And while pharma companies are looking at ways to reinvent themselves, we must also keep in mind that the medical community is looking to do the same thing. For instance, the physician of the future will blend their own expertise with navigating digital systems and AI algorithms to identify serious health threats, while also becoming more steeped in the finance of medicine.<sup>11</sup> And considering how reps must be better prepared for that digital world, to bring real value to physicians, they must be thinking about how their customers are adapting, too.

Jim Gamgort (10:06):

No doubt. In addition to everything else reps currently must know, they must be able to navigate new remote resources and tools. That doesn't mean just taking an in-person meeting and converting it to a remote meeting. That doesn't always work. It's much more complicated than that, due to the amount of information to convey accurately in a relatively short period of time and also to share product samples and other resources effectively and compliantly. That's why I think there may need to be some new changes in the way that marketing and sales view their roles going forward.

Mary Barlow (10:38):

Tell me more about that.

Jim Gamgort (10:40):

Well, sales reps must gain optimal digital navigation skills and an unprecedented level of business acuity. That's the business planning on how to approach each and every day and how to approach their customers. Pharma marketers can consider creating educational resources for patients and their physicians that can be easily delivered in a digital world.

Mary Barlow (10:58):

I agree. This is all to support these new models of care we've been discussing.

Jim Gamgort (11:03):

I also think pharma market access colleagues must be thinking about their supply chains to make it less of a hassle for patients to get the medicines they rely on, in times like these and in as few healthcare

visits as possible. Look, this is a new world for life sciences companies, and some of the greatest ideas for how to educate physicians on their products in this new era are going to come from the colleagues on the front lines.

Mary Barlow (11:25):

Yeah. And obviously at some point, hopefully soon, this crisis will end. And while there will still be virtual meetings, these industry reps will be going back into medical offices to see their customers.

Jim Gamgort (11:39):

Yeah, and when they do, pharma must ensure that the reps are trained on protocols for safe engagement, along with understanding the challenges these medical practices are facing. But this is a start. No doubt, reps must be mindful of the guidelines, which, let's remember, will be different for various specialties and the different regions of the country. But approaching the office in the same way that they did prior to COVID-19 is not an option.

Mary Barlow (12:03):

Yeah. A new mindful approach is required for sure.

Jim Gamgort (12:06):

Absolutely. Well, Mary, I'm glad we had the chance to talk today.

Mary Barlow (12:09):

Me, too. Let's do it again some time.

Jim Gamgort (12:12):

You bet. Well, thanks to our listeners for joining us. By the way, please be sure to visit us at [encompassnl.com/podcast](https://encompassnl.com/podcast), to listen to recent episodes and subscribe using your favorite podcast platform. You can also access the Encompass blog on our site.

### **Conclusion (12:31):**

Encompass Communications and Learning helps life sciences colleagues advance their skills and knowledge. Our team includes experts who've worked in pharmaceutical and medical device sales and marketing, health insurance, medicine, and instructional design. We partner with those in life sciences to create customized communications and learning experiences that support medical advances for patients.

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