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From Doctor's Desk To Chemist Shelf: Closing the Rx Availability Gap

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Introduction:
The RX to Chemist Challenge

"The topic for today is how do we transit the journey from doctor's desk to chemist's shelf — which is closing the RX availability gap."

The webinar opened with a deep reflection on a long-standing issue in pharma marketing: prescription generation without guaranteed product availability at the retail level.

The issue, as acknowledged in the session, is not new.

"The problems still exist... It is always a chicken and egg story — whether prescription comes first or availability."

However, the way companies are approaching and solving the problem has evolved. Earlier, poor visibility and manual data collation hampered the ability to take strategic action:

"Initially, the visibility was poor... Now because of the tech advancement... integrated solutions are available both with the company and at the medical rep level."

Availability is no longer just a sales issue — it's become a collaborative challenge involving medical reps, data systems, retail strategy teams, and supply chain:

"Now it is more of a collaborative effort... not just a responsibility of the medical rep."

The shift toward visibility, integration, and collaboration has set the stage for strategic decision-making based on data — a theme explored in the chapters ahead.

Chapter: 2
Customizing for Better Availability

"When we are talking about segmentation, the pharma industry is evolving and availability challenges are not uniform."

The first tactical deep-dive in the webinar centered on segmentation — the foundation of a targeted availability strategy.

Availability challenges vary by:

- **Geography and patient demographics**
- **Therapy area:** acute vs. chronic product categories
- **Retail type:** doctor-attached chemists, hospital pharmacies, or standalone stores

"The strategy will be very different when we are talking about availability across different retail formats and product types."

For instance, chronic care in urban markets requires different handling compared to acute care in rural zones. Segmentation helps teams identify:

- What retail formats need more support
- Where RX drops and substitutions are likely
- Which regions offer the best ROI on availability investments

"Segmenting the market helps brands prioritize which channel, region, or consumer group to focus on so that RX substitution or drops don't happen."

Question
Are you tailoring availability by therapy, geography, and retail type?

💡 Insight
Segmentation helps reduce RX drop-offs and optimize impact.

Chapter: 3

Chain Pharmacy Revolution

Organized retail players like Apollo, MedPlus, and Wellness Forever have become vital in ensuring medicine availability. A tie-up with these chains can instantly make products available at 40–50 outlets, compared to manual efforts at individual chemists.

"If we are not present in this channel, we're missing a huge opportunity."

However, chain pharmacies work differently — store staff are employees, not decision-makers. Procurement happens centrally, requiring negotiations at a corporate level.

"The person a rep meets at the store isn't the decision-maker."

To manage this, companies are setting up dedicated teams to handle organized retail, separate from traditional sales.

"There is a separate department handling chain pharmacies — like an additional therapy division."

These teams manage contracts, pricing, legalities, and coordination across divisions. **With 10–15%** of business already coming from this segment and rapid growth underway, brands must treat this as a strategic channel.

Question:

Are you prioritizing chain pharmacy as a key growth driver?

💡 Insight:

Organized retail demands structure, not just presence.

Quick Commerce – Friend or Foe?

"Quick commerce and chain pharmacy will play a very important role."

Platforms like **Zepto, Blinkit, Swiggy,** and **Instamart** are reshaping medicine access with doorstep delivery in minutes.

"If they can deliver food items, why not medicines?"

They already have strong logistics, and urban consumers love the convenience. But pharma isn't grocery — Schedule H drugs need prescriptions and licensed handling.

"You can't deliver without a valid prescription and drug license."

Zepto and others have started securing licenses in metros. Meanwhile, local pharmacies are adapting too.

"Pharmacies are collaborating pin-code wise to compete with quick commerce."

Consumers now expect medicines in 10 minutes. Platforms aim to fulfill lakhs of orders daily with average cart values from ₹800 to ₹2000.

"Zepto is handling nearly 50 lakh orders a day."

Though regulatory hurdles remain, demand is driving innovation. Companies must monitor trends and adapt fast.
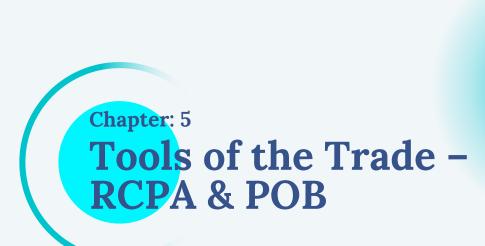
"This model is evolving — we must be vigilant about the changes."

Question   Can your brand meet the 10-minute delivery expectation?

Insight   Quick commerce is a growing channel—not a passing trend.

Tools of the Trade – RCPA & POB

"When we talk about availability, two things come to mind — RCPA and POB."

RCPA (Retail Chemist Prescription Audit) and POB (Personal Order Booking) are long-standing tools in pharma. But for many teams, they've become formalities—ticked off without driving true impact.

The Ground Reality

- RCPA often done post-call with fixed chemists
- Inputs mostly for compliance, not decision-making
- SFA tagging often doesn't reflect real chemist-doctor links

"It's more like a formality... what is the sanctity of that data?"

What Needs to Evolve

- Focus on insight, not just data entry
- Strengthen chemist-RX mapping with real field input
- Use RCPA as a trade visibility enabler, not just a record

GenAI as an Enabler

AI-enhanced SFA tools now offer real-time nudges:
- Suggested chemist targeting
- Gaps in chemist stock levels
- Mismatches between RX and POB

"Tech can do what reps can't — process hundreds of records."

Question:

Are reps capturing insights or just filling formats?

💡 Insight:

When powered by AI, RCPA/POB can drive real availability wins.

Pre-Launch Availability is Non-Negotiable

In pharma, the real test of a product launch begins not at the detailing table, but at the chemist's counter. A brilliant brand story or compelling visual aid won't save a prescription if the product isn't available when a doctor writes it.

Pre-Launch Must-Haves

- **Chemist Detailing Aids:** Ensure retailers know the brand, benefits, and expected demand.

- **Early POB Triggers:** Secure initial orders from key chemists before launch.

- **Sample Placement:** Let chemists experience the product and build confidence in its movement.

Doctors often ask, "Is it available?" before prescribing. If the answer is "No," the opportunity is lost. The launch window is narrow—and availability is the first proof of commitment.

Availability is not a follow-up task—it's a parallel process. Marketing, trade, and sales must work in tandem. When availability aligns with detailing, product trials increase and adoption accelerates.

Availability drives trial. Awareness alone doesn't close prescriptions.

Thoughtful Question:

Do you activate availability before your first detailing—or after doctors start writing the brand?

💡 Golden Insight:

A successful launch starts at the chemist's shelf, not in the rep's bag.

Chapter: 7

Substitution Risk & Chemist Mindset

Every prescription that fails to convert due to non-availability or chemist hesitation is a lost battle. Chemists aren't just stockists—they're influencers. And they won't stock brands they can't move.

The Substitution Trap

- Chemists hesitate to stock unknown or low-demand brands
- Doctor prescriptions don't always guarantee conversion at retail
- Without assurance, they offer alternatives that are readily available

What Pharma Must Do

- **Offer Flexible Credit Terms:** Reduce upfront financial risk for chemists
- **Pre-load Early Demand:** Create pull through doctor engagement and early POB
- **Build Chemist Trust:** Use RCPA insights, sample support, or guaranteed buyback

The key to reducing substitution lies in building confidence at the chemist level. Pharma must support, not just sell. A trusted chemist is the last-mile partner in the RX-to-pickup journey.

Thoughtful Question:

Are you equipping chemists with trust and assurance—or leaving them to substitute your RX?

💡 Golden Insight:

Chemists don't just stock—they influence. Win their trust, and you win the last mile.

Chapter: 6

Conclusion – The Unchanging Truth: Prescription is the Core

In a rapidly evolving world of AI, quick commerce, ePharmacies, and digital tools—one truth remains constant:

"Prescription generation is the heart of pharma."

Technology will evolve. Channels will shift. But unless a valid prescription exists, everything else is moot.

Final takeaways from the experts:

- **MRs are the heroes** – empower, not overload them.
- Invest in **training and mentoring** to prevent tool misuse and high attrition.
- Build collaborative ecosystems—internal teams, chain pharmacies, and platforms.
- Stay **customer-obsessed**—the patient is the reason we exist.

Pharma Brand Readiness Score Card

Click Here

💡 Golden Insight:

Even the best tech can't replace human trust. MRs remain the core of the prescription engine.