Vizient Cell, Gene & Specialty Symposium key takeaways

April 2025

Vizient hosted its second annual Cell, Gene and Specialty Symposium from April 22–24, 2025, at Omni Frisco at The Star in Frisco, Texas. The symposium brought together healthcare leaders, clinicians, payers, suppliers and industry experts to explore the complex landscape of cell and gene therapies. Attendees engaged in panel discussions, regulatory updates and operational best practices sharing, with a focus on enhancing patient access, financial management, contracting strategies and operational excellence.

Key takeaways

- **Cross-department collaboration is essential.** Institutions must foster continuous collaboration across all relevant departments – including managed care, contracting, pharmacy, revenue cycle, finance, legal and IT – to ensure timely and seamless patient access to cell and gene therapies.
- **Clear and deliberate roadmaps are critical.** Developing a well-defined and intentional roadmap for onboarding and approval processes is essential to align stakeholders, streamline workflows and support successful integration of cell and gene therapies into the healthcare system.
- **Automation and communication are vital.** With the increasing volume and complexity of new therapies entering the market, institutions must invest in automated systems that enhance internal communication, promote transparency and improve overall operational efficiency.
- **Negotiating strong contracts is critical.** Organizations should prioritize developing clear and comprehensive agreements, ensuring a full understanding of terms and including safeguards to address unexpected challenges and future uncertainties.
- **Ongoing executive education and advocacy are essential.** Institutions must continuously educate C-suite leadership on the clinical and financial impacts of cell and gene therapies, while also championing advocacy initiatives that promote equitable access and support all patients who could benefit from these transformative treatments.

Welcome and keynote

Steven Lucio, Mittal Sutaria, Carina Dolan and Brian Pinto from Vizient set the stage by emphasizing collaboration, innovation and shared learning Vizient is partaking to advance cell and gene therapies.

Keynote address

Tami John, MD (Stanford Children's Health) presented the keynote address highlighting the current challenges of sickle cell disease and the new hope for curing this debilitating condition.

Shabnam Gaskari (Stanford Children's Health) joined Tami after the keynote address to discuss the patient-centered impact gene therapy offers and how success depends on overcoming cost, manufacturing and access barriers while also building strong cross-functional infrastructure across healthcare systems.

Impactful general sessions

Exploring today's market trends for high impact disease states

Justin Cassidy, Rhae Ana Gamber and Setu Shah from Sg2 analyzed the trajectory of high-impact disease categories, leveraging Sg2's Impact of Change® Forecast and knowledge on industry trends to highlight the explosive growth in infusion therapies, capacity constraints at academic centers and how gene therapies will reshape pediatric and hematology care. Pharmacy was identified as a major outpatient revenue driver.

Advancements in new drugs and regulatory updates for cell and gene therapy

Amanda Frick and Jenna Stern from Vizient delivered updates on new therapeutic approvals and regulatory shifts shaping the gene and cell therapy environment. The cell and gene therapy pipeline is booming with 265 products in development, and major policy shifts – including 340B reforms and site-neutral payment

changes – are reshaping the regulatory landscape. Additional novel gene and cellular immunotherapy products are expected to gain approval in 2025.

Empowering patients – advocacy for access to high-cost cell and gene therapies

Yvonne Carroll (St. Jude Children's Research Hospital) and Bhavesh Shah (Boston Medical Center) discussed patient navigation and policy frameworks to improve equitable access. Access to gene therapy for sickle cell disease remains complex, requiring months-long processes. Barriers extend beyond cost to include operational, administrative and geographic challenges.

Accelerating cell and gene therapy program development

Kristin Helton, Grace Powers and Kelly Terrell of Barnes Jewish Hospital shared a blueprint for academic medical centers to scale programs sustainably. They shared a phased roadmap for onboarding gene therapies, with clearly defined adult and pediatric workflows. Financial stewardship and cross-department alignment were highlighted as key to program success.

The payer perspective in an evolving healthcare system

John McLean (Penn Center for Cancer Care Innovation), Stephanie Spence (CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield) and Jeff Wagner (Texas Children's Hospital) offered a cross-sectional view of reimbursement and value-based care. They emphasized the need for greater transparency in contracting and stronger collaboration among all stakeholders to expand patient access to transformative therapies. Speakers also noted that cell and gene therapy economics vary widely by payer type, requiring billing and reimbursement systems to quickly adapt for ultra-high-cost therapies.

Streamlining interdepartmental approvals

Melissa Chase (Valley Children's Healthcare), Shabnam Gaskari (Stanford Children's Health), Megan Mullalley (Intermountain Health) and Michael O'Neal (Vanderbilt Health) presented coordination models to reduce administrative barriers. Institutions showcased centralized models like Vanderbilt's Advanced Coordination of Therapy (ACT) to expedite therapy access. Tracking through tools like Microsoft Teams and early financial assessments were essential to minimizing delays and risks.

Bridging the gap between pharmacy and finance

Lubna Mazin (Children's Hospital Colorado), Rich Toner (Mayo Clinic) and Carl Urasaki (Children's Hospital Los Angeles) underscored financial stewardship in the deployment of specialty medications. Panelists urged hospitals to rethink cell and gene therapy reimbursement models, treating them more like transplants rather than traditional drugs. They emphasized that cross-functional financial tracking and structured planning workflows are vital to maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Proactive approach to successful contracting for cell and gene therapy

Jenny Craven (UC Davis Health), Robert Richards (Penn Medicine) and Matt Ridge (Cook Children's) explored contracting strategies to manage high-cost therapies. Standardization of contracts (80%) with flexibility for therapy-specific needs (20%), clear recourse terms for manufacturer non-compliance and automation tools, such as AI, for data capture are essential for readiness and risk mitigation.

265+

The cell and gene therapy pipeline is booming with more than 265 products in development.

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