

Case Study: Inviva Rises To The Pandemic Challenge

The COVID-19 crisis brought out the unique strengths of McKesson's INVIVA clinics: agility, ingenuity, and unflinching commitment to patients

Six feet apart. Masks. Hands off the face. The COVID-19 pandemic turned life upside down not only for individuals, but for health services across the country. Specialty medicine distributors scrambled to keep inventory flowing. Patient support programs (PSPs) redoubled their efforts to keep patients safe. Here's how INVIVA, McKesson's flagship network of infusion clinics and leading provider of specialty care to Canadian patients, rose to the occasion.

Case study highlights

The COVID-19 crisis required INVIVA to draw on its deep infrastructure and unique blend of strengths to support patients during the pandemic. This includes:

- Team leaders carefully selected for their background and skills
- Principles "lived and breathed" by the whole INVIVA team
- Support and collaboration from the whole McKesson Canada team
- Clear and consistent safety policies for patients, staff, and personnel in distribution centres
- Deep reach of a global company, coupled with the agility and dedication of a tight team
- Long-standing relationships with manufacturers characterized by transparency and trust
- Proactive mindset: Anticipating needs, rather than reacting to events, and ensuring readiness for what's around the corner.



Calming the fear

While just about everyone worried when news of the pandemic rolled in, INVIVA patients had an extra challenge to manage: powerful specialty medications that work by modifying immune responses. Knowing the extra risks posed by COVID to people with compromised immune systems, many patients cancelled or postponed their infusions, says Norine Primeau-Menzies, Vice-President of INVIVA and Strategic Projects at McKesson Canada. Primeau-Menzies knew this couldn't go on, as the success of specialty drug treatment depends on its regularity.

Primeau-Menzies and her team at INVIVA realized they needed to educate patients—fast. They began sending weekly FAQ sheets to patients, explaining the importance of continuing treatment and the safety precautions INVIVA was putting in place in its clinics. When Crohn's & Colitis Canada invited the INVIVA team and other service providers to present at one of their weekly webinars, they used the teaching moment to outline their new safety protocols to the more than 1,000 patients in attendance. INVIVA and McKesson Specialty Health also stepped up to close the access gaps for patients with suspended or delayed drug

coverage due to job layoffs. "We weren't going to let financial issues stand between patients and their treatment," says Primeau-Menzies. True to this pledge, patients were able to continue their treatment without interruption.

Big-picture team work

INVIVA's communication strategy didn't stop there. To keep its manufacturer partners in the loop, INVIVA sent them daily reports highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on their patients, including cancelled or rescheduled infusions and the reasons for the deferrals.

Working quickly with manufacturers, McKesson pharmacies penned agreements with courier companies to expedite the delivery of medications to patients in remote locations.

In an unprecedented show of solidarity, INVIVA teamed up with three other clinic service providers, meeting weekly to ensure all clinics had enough personal protective equipment (PPE) and all patients had a go-to clinic throughout the pandemic. Widening the net still further, INVIVA offered its infrastructure as a "safety net" to provincial governments scrambling to keep medical services afloat. Anticipating the possibility of a full lockdown, INVIVA worked with different governments to obtain a designation as an essential service.

“Patients wanted triple reassurance. They had hundreds of questions for us, but they all pointed to the same underlying concern: Will you keep us safe?”

Norine Primeau-Menzies, INVIVA



“Such collaboration has never happened before in our competitive industry. Our overarching focus was to have no interruptions to treatment—whatever it took.”

*Norine Primeau-Menzies,
INVIVA*



ASSESS baseline patient status

- Uncertainty about safety
- Questions about how to proceed
- Many infusions canceled



REGROUP to enhance safety measures

- PPE supplies
- Staff and patient education
- Weekly webinar updates
- Clinic safety protocols
- Collaborations with pharmacies



DEPLOY safe new protocols

- Rescheduled infusions
- After-hours infusions for at-risk patients
- Medication delivery
- Virtual and telephone injection training
- Daily reports
- FAQ sheets



STRENGTHEN safety infrastructure

- Safety net protocol and guidelines
- Infrastructure support to governments
- High-tech screening solutions



INVIVA also stepped up communication within its own ranks. Through weekly virtual meetings, “we connected with our national network of nurses to explain our choices of protocol and PPE,” says Lindsey Evans, INVIVA’s National Nurse Educator. The nurses, in turn, “told us what was happening on the ground and what patients needed to feel comfortable.” As Evans sees it, this “deep communication” set McKesson and INVIVA apart during the crisis.

Bringing clinics up to speed

Sourcing PPE for INVIVA’s clinics was anything but easy: the whole world needed this equipment at the same time. Having worked as a front-line emergency nurse and risen through the ranks of hospital management, Primeau-Menzies had just the experience to make it happen. With support from her team and McKesson’s global sourcing network, she tracked down masks in Mexico and gowns in Germany. Needless to say, this required a lot of coordination, “but we got help from our internal stakeholders and McKesson Global Sourcing,” she says. “It’s the kind of behind-the-scenes work that rarely gets noticed outside of a crisis.”

Closer to home, she discovered a plexiglass vendor in Toronto who had quickly integrated face shields into his business. As a result, “we got all the PPE we needed within a short time frame.”

Deciding on safety protocols to deploy at INVIVA clinics posed a further challenge, as each province had slightly different standards—and kept updating them as the medical community learned more about the virus. Intent on sending a unified message to patients and staff, INVIVA “went with the strictest guidelines and applied them to our whole network,” says Evans, who spent hours every day scouring provincial websites to keep up with the evolving guidelines.

“We insisted on medical-grade masks at the clinic. When we showed patients the evidence, they understood and appreciated that we had their safety in mind.”

Lindsey Evans, INVIVA

INVIVA also developed a protocol for patients with COVID-19 who needed infusions. “After their symptoms had cleared, we infused them privately after hours and then disinfected the clinic,” says Primeau-Menzies. The outcome? All patients were able to continue their treatments and not a single patient transmitted the virus to anyone else.

Virtual pivot

While taking every measure to keep clinics safe, INVIVA also looked for opportunities to reduce in-person contacts. With the exception of hemophilia programs, “we stopped going into patients’ homes in the early days to ensure everyone stayed safe,” Primeau-Menzies explains. This meant that self-injection training, traditionally delivered in patients’ homes, would need a technological facelift.

Leveraging its video web conference platform, INVIVA launched a virtual injection training program within six weeks. It was an instant success, with consistently positive feedback from patients, nurses and manufacturer partners alike. For the occasional patient who had trouble with the

High-tech screening solution

INVIVA has about 18,000 patients on therapy—that's 18,000 patients who required COVID screening before setting foot in a clinic. "We realized it would be inefficient to handle that workload manually, so we looked for a different solution," says Primeau-Menzies. Working with its partner schedule management company MemoText, INVIVA automated its COVID screening tool within a week. Every time the screening guidelines changed, the screening software was updated accordingly. The automated process not only streamlined COVID screening, but freed up time for patient care coordinators to maintain their quality of service.

technology, "we offered telephone training as an alternative, but most patients had no problem learning that way, the nurses enjoyed it, and it's more economical," says Primeau-Menzies. "It grew out of a crisis and became a robust, efficient, and sustainable option."

Well worth the effort

Months have now gone by since the "March madness," and Primeau-Menzies reports that patients have become considerably more comfortable, thanks in no small part to INVIVA's intense communication strategy. "If anything, we overcommunicated at the beginning," she reflects. "But it paid off, because everyone settled into the new rhythm within about eight weeks."

During the pandemic, INVIVA single mindedly pursued its goal of uninterrupted care for patients. "We articulated our mantra in week two: 'Every decision we make going forward will be focused on delivering safe infusions to patients and staff,'" Primeau-Menzies recalls. "We still have that mantra today."

Having gotten a close-up view of INVIVA's rigorous safety standards, patients now feel confident about going to the clinic for infusions, and clinic activity has climbed up to what Primeau-Menzies calls a "steady state." "Patients have shown tremendous grace and resilience in adapting to the new normal," she notes, adding that "we were worried they might become less diligent over

time, but they still want to see safety in the clinics. We're all on the same page."



Lasting change

While the old normal had its perks, Primeau-Menzies doesn't see it coming back any time soon. For example, "our patients loved the convenience of in-home injection training, but it was a costly approach for our manufacturer partners. We learned that virtual training can work just as well." She anticipates more creative use of technology across the board, such as apps to help patients adhere to treatment.

The pandemic also laid bare the tremendous power of collaboration—a lesson that will long be remembered. Primeau-Menzies expects to see collaborations with industry

and associations persist long after the pandemic has died down, as well as more robust business continuity plans. "We've lived through something that nobody could have predicted and learned we can rise to the occasion," she says. "Expect more of the same."

About INVIVA:

INVIVA is the first and largest accredited network of private infusion clinics in Canada. With nearly 90 clinics throughout the country, INVIVA seeks to improve the experience of patients managing complex diseases as well as access to specialty treatments. INVIVA's team of highly trained nurses help manage such therapeutic areas as gastroenterology, rheumatology, pediatrics, and geriatrics.



About McKesson Canada:

As Canada's most expansive pharmaceutical distributor, McKesson Canada supplies 7,100 retail pharmacies and 1,350 hospital pharmacies with a third of the medications used in the country. Through this network, McKesson provides distinct and innovative pharmacy-based programs that align with manufacturer objectives. These programs service both traditional and specialty medicines, providing multi-level patient support and facilitating a seamless patient experience.

In addition to community pharmacies, McKesson's presence in Canada encompasses specialty pharmacies, distribution centres, infusion clinics, and corporate offices. The combined strength of these assets has made McKesson the leading provider of health solutions in the country.

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