

Imaging Panda - Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

Interview conducted on March 06, 2023

Topics

Patient Access, Reimbursement, Healthcare Providers, Insurance Navigation, Oncology Drug, Patient-centricity, Sales Strategy, Policy Updates

Summary

During a conversation with a Tegos Client, an Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications explains their role in helping healthcare providers (HCPs) get patients on therapy. They identify clinics that can administer their product and assist them in doing a benefit investigation and getting a predetermination of coverage. If a patient doesn't have coverage or an inability to pay for the drug, they help navigate foundations available. The Associate Director thinks of each patient as a family member and does groundwork upfront to enable a clinic to navigate the process on their own. They gather information on the case, examine barriers to starting therapy, and look at strategies to overcome them. They then reach back out to the clinic to discuss the best path forward. The Associate Director spends 45% of their time on this responsibility and the remaining 55% on proactive calls to accounts, providing updates on policy changes, and billing and coding.

Expert Details

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications and former Immunology Field Reimbursement Manager at Genentech, leaving September 2020. Expert can speak to their experience with field reimbursement at both Advanced Accelerator Applications and Genentech.

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications, a subsidiary of Novartis AG. The expert is responsible for working with hospitals and institutions to ensure that they understand how to acquire and bill for Advanced Accelerator Applications' therapies in the radiopharmaceutical space for the treatment of oncology, neurology, cardiology, infectious and inflammatory diseases.

Prior to Advanced Accelerator Applications, the expert was the Immunology Field Reimbursement Manager at Genentech, leaving September 2020. The expert was responsible for providing reimbursement services and support to minimize patient access barriers for Actemra and Rituxan for rheumatoid arthritis (RA) therapies.

Q: What are your current top 3 goals/focuses in your current role?

A: 1. Ensure that claims are paid correctly for our therapies

2. Ensure that patients have access to our products whether or not they have the ability to pay for it (there are systems in place to help those patients)

3. Ensure that our hospitals and institutions are well-informed about our product and process

Q: What is the job title of your boss/the person right above you in your org? (e.g., Directly reporting to the VP of Market Access)

A: Director, Access and Reimbursement.

Q: What are the job titles of the people you manage/your direct reports? (e.g. Regional Account Manager)

A: Not at the moment.

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Tegus Client

Hi, thanks so much for hopping on today. I want to understand the role of an FRM and understand really how FRMs help HCPs get patients on therapy. So just starting from the top, high level, in your current role, how do you ensure that patients have access to your products whether or not they have the ability to pay for it.

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

So two things. One, making sure that a particular clinic that's using our product is either, one, they have a system by which they do benefit investigations, predeterminations on their own. So there's an internal person at an institution that assures that a patient has coverage.

If they don't have that person in their facility, we have a service where we can assist them to do a benefit investigation and get a predetermination of coverage for the clinic. And then three, if the patient doesn't have coverage or an inability to pay for the drug. There are typically foundations available that we can help a clinic navigate.

Tegus Client

So I want to understand your steps to start a patient under specialty medication. And so if we just start at the beginning, how do you actually first find out that a clinic or patient needs your assistance?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

I guess not each and every patient comes my way as far as me interfacing or helping with the clinic to get coverage for a patient. I think we do a lot of groundwork upfront, so they understand what the process is, what they need to do, what's going to be required by a payer for a patient to have access to our product. So I think there's a lot of preventative work that is done upfront to enable a clinic to kind of navigate this process on their own.

Tegus Client

And then what about when a patient does come your way, how does that work out? How do you find out about that?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

So typically, that's going to be a clinic reaching out to me, picking up the phone, giving me a call, letting me know that they have an issue with a patient's coverage, and they're looking for next steps.

Tegus Client

And kind of in your eyes, there's a lot of different ways that you support. You can support an account, you can support a clinician or like their stats, you can support a patient. In your eyes, what's your unit of measure every time you provide assistance. Do you think of them as cases? Do you think of them as accounts, something else?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

I think of them as patients.

Tegus Client

And why is that?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

Well, for our particular product, it's an oncology drug. And so each patient is potentially a father, a brother a dad, the cousin, what have you. I try to keep it, there's a patient, always at the end of each one of these prescribing decisions.

Tegus Client

So I want to go through each of these steps. So if you think about determining which clinic or patient to

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directly assist, is that the true beginning for you? Or is there a step before that or anything else that comes before you can actually start assisting?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

So I guess in the particular space that I'm working in, it really is going to come down to identifying the clinic that has the capability to administer our product. The space I'm working in, not everybody is able to administer this. It's a highly specialized infusion process. So we need to identify who has the capacity and the willingness to do this.

Tegus Client

I know not every patient kind of has to come through you. And an institution will contact you directly when they need help, how do you actually think about which clinic to assist? I'm sure you're managing a bunch of different accounts. Like how do you have decide who to assist in a given moment?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

Well, I assist everybody, and it's not a scenario where I'm having to make that decision where somebody is going to fall by the wayside. Anybody who is using our product will get assistance from me. It might not be today, maybe tomorrow, maybe it's a more complicated issue and we need to do additional research and figure out how we can assist the patient, but everybody is going to get assistance.

Tegus Client

So I'd love to walk through an example. So let's say a clinic contacted you, they're capable. They have a patient. They want to start on the therapy, but they need help. So you've determined who you're going to assist, let's say you're just assisting this clinic or HCP. Are these the real steps that you go through?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

So currently, I don't get patient-level information. I don't have that at my fingertips right now. So that's something we're working on. But I'm relying on a clinic to get me up to speed on what is going on with this particular patient. But then I do gather information on the case, not necessarily from the hub, but from the clinic itself. I'm not going to be gathering information from the sales rep.

Maybe initially, a sales rep would reach out to me and say, "Hey, there's an issue at this particular clinic. But then gather information on the payers' coverage for the patient, gather information on the case from the clinic and really understand why they reached out, what's the issue, what steps have they taken, what have they received from information? Where is the roadblock and then move forward to help solve the problem.

Tegus Client

And just to understand why don't you have to gather information from the sales rep?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

Just because our roles are differentiated where it's not a case where the sales rep has been, it's not part of their job description to get into the weeds on a particular patient's reimbursement challenges. You can go down a rabbit hole pretty quickly on these cases. And so they've been instructed to turn that type of question over to us to investigate.

Tegus Client

And then why don't you have to gather information from the hub?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

We just don't have that access. We don't have, in my current role, I don't have access to information at the hub. I guess, if I think back to my previous company, we did have information. I could go in and see the patient's information. And so I would go in and do a preliminary look to see why there might be a reimbursement challenge.

I want to see that they've submitted all the paperwork correctly for a benefit investigations, all the signatures are there. And a lot of times, you'd go in and you'd see, maybe there's a missing document or something. And so that was an easy fix or you would see what the patient's co-pays are and maybe why they're not getting systems at a particular level based on what they have or have that met from out of pocket or co-pay assistance standpoint.

Tegus Client

So you're saying in kind of your current role, you actually don't touch and have access to any of the information that the hub collects?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

Not yet. They're working on that. We need to go through a process where we're authorized to have PHI, personal health information. So not all people in this type of role are certified to have PHI.

Tegus Client

And so I guess maybe let me understand like the workflow, are you saying like it's just you're not there yet in your company where you can access PHI and work with the hub? Or are you saying kind of that's just not going to be a part of like an FRM's role at your company?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

Well, so two things. So we're not there yet. That's something they're working on getting us. So in the near future, we will have access to each and every patient through our hub. But the second part of your question is not every FRM, to my knowledge, not every company is set up the same way as far as what they provide to people that are in an FRM roles.

Tegus Client

Got it. And then what about gathering information about the case from the account's staff, is that a legitimate step for you?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

No, I wouldn't locate the patient's contact information. I mean I would obviously have the clinic's contact information because they've reached out for helping solving their problem.

Tegus Client

So then gathering the information on the payer's coverage for the patient, like the only real step for you?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

Yes.

Tegus Client

Is there anything else that you have to locate or gather outside of that before you move on?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

No. I mean, that's pretty much it. Because we're going to examine the barriers. We're going to look at policy.

Tegus Client

So are these two steps legitimate for you?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

Yes. I think probably examining barriers to starting the therapy. I mean that's going to be looking at, understanding what the barrier is? Is it a payer policy? Maybe it's an off-label use of a product, maybe they don't have any coverage and then you're going to look at the strategies to overcome that.

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So patients uninsured, we're going to try and get them over to the foundation or it's an off-label use of the product, or maybe it's that the insurance company provided an incorrect benefit investigation because they're based on everything we've learned and looked at, they're on label, they meet the payer policy and it should be approved. So it's a matter of maybe guiding some of these to reach back out to a payer to reconsider the benefit investigation.

Tegus Client

And what else do you have to prepare ?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

I think that we've pretty much covered it. Based on everything we've gathered, the info, I'm going to do the research on my end on examining barriers and understand where we're at and how we can overcome this. And then we're going to reach back out to the clinic and have a discussion about what we've overcome and kind of come to a mutually agreeable decision on what the best case is to move forward with.

Tegus Client

I know how complex kind of the insurance system is. But why do you have to really understand the scenario before you can move on?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

Just because there's there's so many things that could be happening. In my experience, it's just not a black and white easy, this solution. You've got to make sure you understand everything that's going on, so you can give them good accurate, a good path forward where the patient is going to have coverage, the clinic is going to get reimbursed correctly. It's a reasonable scenario. Yes, you've got to just understand all, everything that's happened.

Tegus Client

And then in deciding how to overcome barriers, are these legitimate steps?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

I had to overcome the barrier to the therapy. So based on everything, all the research you've done looking at policy, understanding the patient's individual scenario, you've decided how to overcome the barrier. And then I'm going to pick up the phone and call my contact at the clinic. and say, based on our discussion, everything I've looked at, this is what I've decided, this is my recommendation moving forward.

Tegus Client

Got it. And why do you decide to call them as opposed to some other form of contact?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

I've got a large geography that I'm covering right now. So it's not always realistic to visit them in person. I think most often, I've got relationships with these people. And so pick up a phone and give them a call is just an easy way to respect their time and solve the problem for them. Sometimes you'll jump on a Zoom call or something, but most often, it just needs to be a phone call.

Tegus Client

And what's your workflow for that? Is it, you just cold call them, do you have to schedule an appointment with them, something else?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

No, I would just generally just pick up a phone and call them back. The top of their list, it's an issue for them. They want it solved, and so they're typically very willing to pick up a phone and talk with me.

Tegus Client

And do you usually know who you need to speak with within the organization? Or do you have their direct line? Or do you have to kind of figure out how to get to them?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

I have their direct line or their cell phone.

Tegus Client

What about contacting the account to shares strategies for overcoming barriers?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

No, I think we kind of covered that.

Tegus Client

Can you explain that.

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

Well, step four decides how to overcome the barriers to the therapy. And so we decided how to do that by contacting the clinic and share the strategies.

Tegus Client

And is there anything else that you have to do besides just making that phone call to the clinic to help explain to them how to overcome the barriers.

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

Sometimes I might include a link to a Medicare site or a payer policy. I might be including, maybe we need, we've decided that the patient needs, doesn't have an ability to pay for the drug, and we're going to see if they would qualify for a foundation drug. So I would include links to the documents that they need to fill out and have signed and sent in so we can start that process. I'll send along whatever information they need to overcome the reimbursement barrier.

Tegus Client

And just trying to understand this a little bit, why do you have to share I guess, links or other types of documents. Like why can't you just do it over the phone?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

I mean I could tell them to go to a website and find this document or find that document. I feel like that's the easy way out, I'd rather take the time, but it's easy for me. I know where all this stuff is. And these clinics are dealing with multiple different drugs and multiple different processes to deal with this type of issue. So I'm going to make it as easy as I can for them, supply the links that they need so they can move forward and get the problem solved with minimal additional work.

Tegus Client

No problem. Are these legitimate steps for you?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

Yes. So we came up with a solution to overcome this barrier. Are you good with everything? Do you have any additional questions? Have I made everything clear? Yes, I know what I need to do. I appreciate the information. I'm going to throw out this, that and the other thing and send that in. And then typically, as far as tracking the progress.

I mean it really does at the end of the day, kind of land in their lap. I will usually follow up in a couple of

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weeks with these folks just to see how they did and what the outcome was for those patients just because I'd like to know for my own peace of mind and make sure they follow it up because, again, it's a patient, at the end of the day. And we owe it to them to make sure they get what they need.

Tegus Client

So you make an initial call, explain it, and you'll schedule a follow up call to make sure that they understand what's going on and then also probably check on their process. Am I understanding that right?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

Yes, I had a case the other day where a patient was denied, and there was an invalid policy that the payer referenced. And they appealed the decision. And well, it's going to be three weeks while they wait for the appeal, I say, okay, put a note in my calendar, follow-up and they were able to get the appeal overturned and get the patient on the medicine.

Tegus Client

And do you ever call the patient directly? Does that ever happen in your role?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

No, not in my current role.

Tegus Client

Is this a legitimate step?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

Yes. Like that example I gave you where a payer referenced the policy where the patient was denied, okay. Well, let's try and appeal that because we know that's not right. Here's a link to their policy they should be referencing. And so if that initial strategy doesn't work and they kind of run into a dead end, yes, we're going to look at other alternatives, more than likely, in that case, we see if we can get the patient on free drug from the company foundation drug.

Tegus Client

Got it. And I guess, what else do you have to update or adjust in this step beyond just that was written here?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

In my current role, there's really nothing I need to update or adjust. You mean like in a tracking system?

Tegus Client

Yes. I guess if there's any types of adjustments or updating that you have to make when you're helping one of your stakeholders in this process?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

No.

Tegus Client

And do you have a list of strategies kind of ready? Or do you just come up with them in real time for each case?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

I'm coming up with them in real time for each case. Because who knows what's happening? What kind of crazy results did you get? What are they telling you now? Brother?

Tegus Client

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Is there anything else that you have to monitor or track in verifying the account and track the account progress before you move on?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

No, I mean there's not a sophisticated kind of tracking system that we're using. Once we kind of come to terms with the clinic and what the plan is the responsibility really lies in their hands to get this fixed. We just kind of help them come up with a solution. So it's up to them to move it forward.

Tegus Client

It sounds like you're not really using a tracking system, like you do the process.

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

I hang up the phone.

Tegus Client

Is there's anything else you kind of have to do to just finish this process to say, this patient is done, can move on?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

No. I mean, also on a follow-up, maybe you could consider that follow-up e-mail with the necessary links and information would kind of close the loop.

Tegus Client

So are there any other steps that are missing from this list that you have to do?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

No, I think that's a pretty good list.

Tegus Client

Which of these steps takes up the most of your time?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

Probably deciding how to overcome barriers and confirm sales reps and confirm consent is on record.

Tegus Client

And why is that?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

I guess it would be, examining the barriers to why they're not getting reimbursed or paid, probably takes the most time, three and four are both going to be very probably equally as busy. You got to understand it, then you got to decide how to overcome it. And that can take a lot of research to figure out what is going on.

Tegus Client

So it sounds like there's no steps missing. Is this the right order? Is this the real order for you of how you actually tackle a patient from start to finish?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

So I've got a large geography, I cover. This isn't the only part of my job. We're doing proactive education on payer policy, bringing clinics on board and making sure they have the ability to utilize our therapies. We're doing proactive education on how to bill for this?

What types of patients are appropriate. And so this is one piece of it as far as overcoming barriers to access.

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I guess I think of this is more of a reactive component of what I do because we try to do all the education upfront and give them the resources and the tools. So kind of teach a man to fish, so they continue to go forward. But then when they run into issues, I think this is, when there's a reimbursement challenge, I think these are good steps and with the exception that I don't have a hub to log into and to see all this information, relying on the customer to give that to me.

Tegus Client

Awesome. So if you think about the last couple of weeks, what percent of your time did you actually have to spend on this kind of responsibility of helping your HCPs navigate the barriers?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

I would say probably 45%.

Tegus Client

And how would you allocate the other remaining 55% of your time?

Associate Director, Access and Reimbursement at Advanced Accelerator Applications

The other 55% of my time, it's going to be proactive calls to all of my accounts, reaching out to them, checking in, so we don't get in a situation where they've got 25 claims that have been denied, providing. And then in addition to that, it's providing updates for payer policy, changes in Medicare rules and regulations, billing and coding.

Tegus Client

Awesome. Well, thank you so much. You have a great rest of your day.

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