

HEALTH SYSTEM REFORM: INCORPORATING PHARMACIST SERVICES

Pharmacists help achieve the best possible medical outcomes from the use of prescription medications through various types of medication-related services. These include collaboration with physicians and other healthcare providers, support of public health education strategies, wellness counseling, and preventative care services. Some of the specialized services that pharmacists implement in their community practices include:

Medication Therapy Management

- MTM is a healthcare service provided by a pharmacist to help patients and/or caregivers optimize the benefits of medication, minimize risks associated with medication use, and maximize the cost-effectiveness of medication therapy. Reforms to the health care system should include an expansion of MTM services.
- Medication adherence- One important contributor to suboptimal medication use is lack of medication adherence. Suboptimal adherence has been linked to a number of adverse outcomes, including unnecessary disease progression, disease complications, reduced functional abilities, lower quality of life, and premature death. Pharmacists can help patients improve medication adherence, particularly in chronic disease treatment.

Immunizations

- The unique access of the public to pharmacists, including extended hours of operation and weekend availability, coupled with the persuasiveness of a trusted health care professional, places pharmacists in a position to have major impact on reducing vaccine-preventable illness and death. Pharmacists already provide flu and pneumonia vaccines under Medicare Part B and other vaccines under Medicare Part D. Any strategy to increase vaccination rates should include a role for the community pharmacist.

Disease Management Screening Programs

- Diabetes screening/education - Involving pharmacists in diabetes management and screening can identify those patients who may not have been identified in the past, help them manage their diabetes, and ultimately prevent long-term complications of the disease.
- Blood pressure monitoring - Pharmacist care in a collaborative environment can result in patients achieving blood pressure goals significantly more often than those receiving usual medical care, even if their baseline blood pressure is relatively high.
- Cholesterol screening - Pharmacists can test a patient for total cholesterol, high-density lipoprotein cholesterol, and triglycerides. Pharmacists then counsel patients on lifestyle changes and medications as appropriate based on preset screening guidelines.
- Respiratory function screening - Community pharmacists are in an ideal position to identify patients with respiratory diseases or help manage patients who have already been diagnosed with Asthma or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). Pharmacists will review patient prescription records and counsel patients on medications, lifestyle issues and device usage.

- Body fat screening and obesity - Pharmacists can take measurements of a patient's body mass and fluid content. The pharmacist and patient then review these measurements and the patient is counseled on proper nutrition and exercise.
- Smoking cessation - Pharmacists are ideally positioned to educate their patients about the effects of smoking on their health, encourage them to think about quitting, and work with them through the cessation process. Pharmacists sell products and offer services to help reduce smoking.
- Bone density screening- A pharmacist can assess risk factors for osteoporosis; perform a non-invasive bone density screening, and counsel on ways to improve bone health.

The pharmacist makes use of both prescription care and general health knowledge to provide public health services in the form of individualized consultation and care. They are often readily accessible within the community — in some cases 24 hours per day, and no appointment is needed at most community pharmacies. This convenience creates an opportunity to provide much-needed access to care and education, training and prevention services. Community pharmacists take pride in professionally fulfilling their pivotal position in the health care system of providing information and consultation that can help change lifestyles and influence healthy outcomes.