POLICY STATEMENT

STATEMENT ON THE ROLE OF THE PHARMACIST IN PATIENT ADVOCACY

Preamble

Caring for the patient requires an interdisciplinary approach, regardless of where the patient resides. Pharmaceutical care services are especially important for vulnerable populations such as the elderly. As the most accessible health care professional, the pharmacist is positioned to be a source of information and referral to health and community resources.

As a patient advocate across the continuum of care, pharmacists are encouraged to stay abreast of resources and tools that will maintain their ability to better serve their patients. With frequent patient contact and a thorough knowledge of medication use in older adults, pharmacists have the potential to be useful and effective patient advocates.

Arguments

ASCP believes that the pharmacist should actively identify patient-related needs. This includes being alert to possible signs of unrecognized medical conditions such as depression, cognitive decline or mental confusion, and psychosocial issues such as elder abuse and barriers to access to care. Pharmacists should assist patients with referral for evaluation and support, based upon an assessment of the patient’s needs.

ASCP also believes that the patient advocacy role of the pharmacist can best be fulfilled by the pharmacist accepting responsibility for all aspects of the medication use process. ASCP recognizes that well designed utilization management strategies (e.g., drug product selection, drug use evaluation, practice guidelines) are appropriate in a cost-conscious health care environment. ASCP encourages its members to develop or adopt utilization management strategies that can enhance the quality of patient care. However, optimizing patient outcomes, including quality of life issues, must supersede economic considerations in all such activities.

The pharmacist should be a source of information and referral to health and community resources for the patient, family, and caregiver as well as other health team members. There are multiple ways to disseminate information regarding community services,
including via telephone consultations, pharmacy web site, displays, brochures, health fairs and educational programs. Furthermore, quality of care and quality of life can be impacted by a wide variety of medical, psychosocial, financial, legal, and other issues. For example, financial issues and transportation may be reasons for lack of access to medical care, poor adherence to medications or lack of medical follow-up. Pharmacists who know how to refer and access resources that could meet those challenges can contribute significantly to aging in place and improving quality of care and quality of life.

**Position**

Pharmacists have a great opportunity to disseminate a valuable mix of pharmaceutical care and information regarding community services to the elderly patient, family, caregiver, and other health team members. ASCP supports that pharmacists should serve as patient advocates by actively identifying patient-related needs, being a source of information regarding health and community resources, and providing appropriate referrals to community-based services as indicated.

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