



Counterpoint to American Medical Association’s (AMA) position on Pharmacist Scope of Practice

Healthcare is entering into a critical phase in the United States. The number of people seeking healthcare continues to grow while healthcare professionals are increasingly reporting burnout, especially after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Making it more challenging is the drop-off in applications to professional training programs in medicine and pharmacy, among others. Due to the widening gap between the supply of healthcare professionals and the demand for their services, there is an urgent need for all available healthcare professionals to be utilized to the maximum extent possible and at the apex of their training and expertise.

The fact that pharmacists are highly trained but underutilized is not well known. For over 50 years, pharmacists have participated in the care of critically ill patients in the hospital, in assisting their recovery after going home or to long term care and in maintaining their good health thereafter. For almost that long, pharmacists have managed the use of blood thinning medications by patients at high risk of stroke or with other thrombotic disease, utilizing their unique expertise in anticoagulant management. Hospital pharmacists monitor and adjust immunomodulator, oncolytic, and antibiotic drugs—among others—in patients with diseases that often require powerful and potentially toxic medications. Retail or community pharmacists work in settings where patients require monitoring of their medication therapy. Ambulatory Care pharmacists are well suited to managing medication used by patients with a variety of diseases. In every setting, there are opportunities for pharmacists to collaborate with their fellow healthcare practitioners to realize better access to care for their patients.

Of any healthcare professional, pharmacists are the most highly trained to understand drugs and their effects on human body, disease states, on other drugs when they are taken together, and their combined effects on their elimination from the body. This whole-body view of medication management allows pharmacists to provide important insights to their allied Healthcare Professionals. This collaboration allows everyone to utilize this knowledge in making decisions to the benefit of patients. This expertise is the result of a graduate-level education that leads to a Doctor of Pharmacy degree. These programs provide pharmacists with more training in drug therapy than does any other healthcare profession. Courses in pharmacology, physiology, biopharmaceutics, and numerous related topics gives them a comprehensive base to which even more specialized education can be added. Although residencies are not required, the number of pharmacists who undertake post-graduate residencies is high. Of those, some continue on for second and even third year of post-graduate residencies to further hone their medication management skills in specific areas of disease state management such as oncology and emergency medicine.

The public, by and large, is exposed to pharmacists at one work setting: the retail pharmacy. They provide consultation that is culturally sensitive, and because they are so accessible, they can readily answer the many questions that patients ask. Another unseen value of these pharmacy professionals emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic when they



remained available to provide immunizations and medications to all despite restrictions placed on other businesses. Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians came to work because they cared. They knew that was what was expected of them, they did their jobs, and they did it without fanfare. As mentioned above, pharmacists are also trained to work in acute and subacute care settings as well as ambulatory care settings where they are vital in assisting patient compliance with medication therapies through telemanagement.

Now that the underutilized potential of the pharmacist is coming to light, the public can now ask, “What more can a pharmacist do for me?” It starts, of course, with an understanding of what a pharmacist’s training and licensure enables them to do. There is plenty of work out there for pharmacists in dispensing medications, no question there. Pharmacists have prioritized their workload for years, always putting the patient’s safety and well-being at the forefront. When a pharmacist is allowed to practice to the maximum extent possible under their license, their patients—from the very youngest to the very oldest—are experiencing fewer side effects, better health outcomes and taking fewer medications. All these result in an overall reduction in the cost of healthcare. This does not need to happen only in the retail pharmacy setting. Pharmacists are willing and able to collaborate with every healthcare provider to enhance positive patient outcomes. This must be a team effort, wherever healthcare professionals work together. It is time to start ensuring that all healthcare professionals are empowered to work to the maximum benefit of the public. The sooner this happens, the sooner healthcare becomes more affordable and accessible to all.

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