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The Ambulatory Care Career Tool

The purpose of the ambulatory care pharmacist was defined in [ASHP's Ambulatory Care Summit](#) in 2014. Many organizations promote incorporating pharmacists onto interprofessional health care teams as ambulatory care pharmacists improve patient outcomes, lower healthcare costs, and improve the patient experience. As a result, there is growing interest in ambulatory care pharmacy practice as an exciting and impactful career choice. Pharmacists are frequently called upon to explain the ambulatory care pharmacy practice model to others who are less familiar with this innovative role.¹

ASHP's [Section of Ambulatory Care Practitioners \(SACP\)](#) is committed to advancing and supporting the professional practice of pharmacists working as medication-use specialists, patient care providers, and operational specialists in ambulatory care settings. The Ambulatory Care Career Tool was developed to promote the incorporation of pharmacists into ambulatory care settings and provide additional resources for multiple stakeholders who desire to learn more about this area of practice. Personalized handouts were tailored for four unique populations including pharmacy students, pharmacists, healthcare leaders, and the public. The purpose of this tool is to support ASHP members who are sharing the story about the important role of ambulatory care pharmacists. These resources can be easily shared with students during advising meetings, with pharmacists who are considering a career change, with healthcare leaders as part of an entrepreneurial pitch, and with the public to promote the profession of pharmacy.

1. Hennefent JA, Buxon JA. Ambulatory care: Pharmacists will play a vital role. In: Zellmer WA, ed. Pharmacy forecast 2015–2019: Strategic planning advice for pharmacy departments in hospitals and health systems. Bethesda, MD: Center for Health-Systems Pharmacy Leadership, ASHP Research and Education Foundation; 2014:9–12.

Ambulatory Care Career Tool Documents

What is Ambulatory Care Pharmacy Practice?

1. For Student Pharmacists
2. For the Transitioning Pharmacists
3. For Hospital Administrators
4. For the Public

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Is Ambulatory Care Pharmacy Practice Right for Me? Tips for the Pharmacy Student

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What is Ambulatory Care Pharmacy Practice?

Ambulatory care pharmacy practice is the provision of integrated, accessible healthcare services by pharmacists who are accountable for addressing medication needs, developing sustained partnerships with patients, and practicing in the context of family and community. Ambulatory care pharmacists may work in hospital-based or community-based settings, and are involved in the direct care of a diverse patient population.

Ambulatory care pharmacists are involved in:

- Direct patient care and medication management for ambulatory patients
- Long term relationships with patients
- Coordination of care
- Patient advocacy
- Wellness and health promotion
- Triage and referral
- Patient education and self-management

What does an Ambulatory Care Pharmacist Do?

- Ambulatory Care Pharmacists provide comprehensive medication management for a wide variety of patients with chronic health conditions. They work closely with other members of the healthcare team including physicians, nurses, behavioral health specialists, and others.
- Ambulatory Care Pharmacists may have an expanded scope of practice depending on their state and practice location. Most states allow collaborative practice agreements with pharmacists and physicians which enable pharmacists to initiate, adjust, and discontinue medications, order and monitor laboratory studies, and perform limited physical assessment.
- In some states including California, North Carolina, and New Mexico, Ambulatory Care Pharmacists may serve patients as an Advanced Practice Pharmacist (APP), Clinical Pharmacist Practitioner (CPP), or Pharmacist Clinician (PhC), respectively.

Ambulatory care pharmacist(s) may be involved in the following: development, implementation and evaluation of patient care services; disease state management under a collaborative drug management agreement; public health initiatives; coordination of care; patient advocacy, comprehensive medication reviews; review of laboratory results; wellness and health promotion; triage and referral; transitions of care; patient adherence; and patient education.

As an example, a family medicine physician may partner with an Ambulatory Care Pharmacist to improve patient care and quality measures for patients with Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus. In this role, the pharmacist may provide comprehensive medication management, allowing them to*:

- Review blood glucose readings and assess current glycemic control

- Initiate, adjust, and/or discontinue oral and injectable medications for diabetes
- Order and interpret labs (hemoglobin A1C, basic metabolic panel, lipid panel, urine microalbumin)
- Measure blood pressure and heart rate and initiate, adjust, or discontinue therapy as appropriate to reach therapeutic goals
- Conduct a cardiovascular disease risk assessment and initiate statin therapy as appropriate
- Perform a diabetic foot exam
- Screen patients for depression using a standardized tool such as the PHQ-2 or PHQ-9
- Provide patient education on glucometers, medications, hypoglycemia, diet, and exercise
- Review all medications for appropriateness and evaluate drug-drug interactions
- Ensure patients have access to affordable medications
- Recommend and administer immunizations such as influenza and pneumococcal vaccines
- Refer patients to diabetes education classes, ophthalmology, nutrition, or social work
- Document patient encounters in the electronic health record
- Refer patients for additional care as necessary

*depending on practice site and state pharmacy practice acts

Are There Residencies in Ambulatory Care Pharmacy Practice?

There are many opportunities for pharmacy residents to gain experience in ambulatory care pharmacy practice. Students who are considering residency programs should evaluate what type of pharmacy practice is right for them, and identify residency programs with ambulatory care experiences that best meet their needs and career goals.

PGY1 Pharmacy Residency Programs offer broad-based, entry-level exposure to pharmacy practice (including Ambulatory Care) in terms of operations, clinical practice, and research. Some PGY1 residencies may achieve all of the required goals and objectives in the ambulatory care setting, whereas others may be based in the acute care setting while providing a longitudinal or one month experience in ambulatory care. In addition, some community pharmacy residencies may include an educational experience in the ambulatory care environment.

PGY2 Pharmacy Residency Programs offer a specialized approach to managing patients in multiple practice settings, including ambulatory care.

Additional information about ambulatory care pharmacy practice can be found on the ASHP Ambulatory Care Resource Center <https://www.ashp.org/Pharmacy-Practice/Resource-Centers/Ambulatory-Care>



Tips for Changing Pharmacy Careers: Transitioning to Ambulatory Care Pharmacy Practice

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What is Ambulatory Care Pharmacy Practice?

Ambulatory care pharmacy practice is *the provision of integrated, accessible healthcare services by pharmacists who are accountable for addressing medication needs, developing sustained partnerships with patients, and practicing in the context of family and community.*

Ambulatory care pharmacy practice focuses on patient centered care, comprehensive medication management, long-term relationships with patients, coordination of care, patient advocacy, wellness and health promotion, triage and referral, successful transitions, and patient education and self-management.

National organizations including the Patient Centered Primary Care Collaborative and the National Governor's Association have published documents that applaud the role of the Ambulatory Care Pharmacist in integrated healthcare teams.

What types of patient care services does an Ambulatory Care Pharmacist provide?

- Ambulatory Care Pharmacists provide comprehensive medication management for a wide variety of patients with chronic health conditions.
- Ambulatory Care Pharmacists may have an expanded scope of practice which may be designated by practice type (i.e., Veterans Affairs) or pharmacy practice acts. Most states allow collaborative practice agreements with pharmacists and physicians which enable pharmacists to initiate, adjust, and discontinue medications, order and monitor laboratory studies, and perform limited physical assessment.
- In some states including California, North Carolina, and New Mexico, Ambulatory Care Pharmacists may serve patients as an Advanced Practice Pharmacist (APP), Clinical Pharmacist Practitioner (CPP), or Pharmacist Clinician (PhC), respectively.

What does the ambulatory care pharmacy practice model look like?

Pharmacists who practice in ambulatory care provide direct patient care services for patients with chronic illnesses, promote health and wellness, and participate in innovative patient visits including transitions in care, group visits, patient education classes, shared visits, and Medicare Wellness Visits. Patients may be referred to the pharmacist by the physician or other providers for comprehensive medication management, and pharmacists may also manage specific populations of patients.

As an example, a family medicine physician may partner with an Ambulatory Care Pharmacist to improve patient care and quality measures for patients with Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus. In this role, the pharmacist may provide comprehensive medication management, allowing them to*:

- Review blood glucose readings and assess current glycemic control
- Initiate, adjust, and/or discontinue oral and injectable medications for diabetes
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- Perform a diabetic foot exam
- Screen patients for depression using a standardized tool such as the PHQ-2 or PHQ-9
- Provide patient education on glucometers, medications, hypoglycemia, diet, and exercise
- Review all medications for appropriateness and evaluate drug-drug interactions
- Ensure patients have access to affordable medications
- Recommend and administer immunizations such as influenza and pneumococcal vaccines
- Refer patients to diabetes education classes, ophthalmology, nutrition, or social work
- Document patient encounters in the electronic health record
- Refer patients for additional care as necessary

*depending on what is allowed in state pharmacy practice acts

Where can I practice as an Ambulatory Care Pharmacist?

The Ambulatory Care Pharmacist practices in hospital-based or community-based clinics involved in direct care of a diverse patient population. Examples of practice environments include:

- Primary care clinics such as family medicine or internal medicine clinics
- Patient Centered Medical Homes (PCMH)
- Accountable Care Organizations (ACO)
- Veterans Affairs Medical Centers
- Indian Health Service Clinics
- Community based or free clinics
- Federally Qualified Health Centers
- Rural Health Clinics
- Outpatient clinics associated with academic medical centers
- Self-insured employer clinic

What resources are available to help me become an Ambulatory Care Pharmacist?

All pharmacists must be skilled in critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, and providing patient-centered care. When transitioning to ambulatory care pharmacy practice, it is important to consider additional skills that may need development in order to succeed in this environment. A continuing professional development approach can assist in the development of skills in the following areas:

- Management of common chronic and acute disease states
- Promotion of health and wellness
- Communication with patients and healthcare providers
- Health literacy
- Cultural competence
- Motivational interviewing
- Reimbursement
- Documenting in the medical record
- Triaging patient complaints outside the scope of the pharmacist to other providers

Pharmacists who wish to transition to ambulatory care practice may want to consider becoming board certified in ambulatory care. The Board of Pharmaceutical Specialties has developed a **Board Certification in Ambulatory Care (BCACP)** credential that assesses competencies in five domains including pharmacotherapy, collaboration and patient advocacy, translation of evidence into practice, practice models and policies, and population and public health.

The American Society of Health-System Pharmacy convened an **Ambulatory Care Summit** in 2014, and ambulatory care experts from across the nation met to define ambulatory care practice and explore patient

care models, sustainable business models, and outcomes evaluations for services. Proceedings from this meeting have been published, and serve as a national standard for ambulatory care practice. Pharmacists who are changing careers should become familiar with new models of healthcare delivery including the PCMH and ACO, which emphasize quality of care provided instead of the fee-for-service models, and also investigate collaborative practice agreements that are allowed within individual states' pharmacy practice acts.

Specific resources to assist pharmacists as they transition into an ambulatory care practice environment include:

- Board of Pharmaceutical Specialties Board Certification in Ambulatory Care
- ASHP's Proceedings from the Ambulatory Care Summit
- ASHP's Ambulatory Care Self-Assessment Tool
- Publications on the role of the pharmacist in the PCMH and the ACO
- Chronic disease management certificate programs (i.e., diabetes, medication therapy management, immunizations)
- State and national professional meetings to network with other ambulatory care pharmacists
- ASHP Connect
- Your state's pharmacy practice act and rules for collaborative practice agreements

Additional tools related to ambulatory care practice can be found on the ASHP Ambulatory Care Resource Center at <https://www.ashp.org/Pharmacy-Practice/Resource-Centers/Ambulatory-Care>.

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Ambulatory Care Pharmacy Practice: Information for Hospital Administrators

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Medication Related Problems

Medication related problems such as adverse events, drug interactions, and medication nonadherence increase healthcare costs. The cost of drug related morbidity and mortality is approximately \$200 billion annually, which is more than is spent on the cost of medications themselves. Appropriate medication use is complicated by the aging population, the burden of chronic disease, and the projected shortage of primary care physicians.

Health Care Transformation

The delivery of healthcare is currently undergoing a significant transformation that seeks to lower healthcare costs, improve the quality of care that is delivered, and improve the patient experience. Accountable care organizations and patient centered medical homes are shifting the U.S. healthcare system from a fee-for-service system to one centered in value-based care. The physician is evolving into a team leader who coordinates the care for patients with assistance and input from team members such as nurses, pharmacists, behavioral health experts, and others, who practice at the top of their scope to ensure that patients achieve their healthcare goals. The Patient Centered Primary Care Collaborative and the National Governors Association support embedding ambulatory care pharmacists into primary care settings as part of this healthcare delivery transformation.

What is Ambulatory Care Pharmacy Practice?

Ambulatory care pharmacy practice is *the provision of integrated, accessible healthcare services by pharmacists who are accountable for addressing medication needs, developing sustained partnerships with patients, and practicing in the context of family and community.*

Ambulatory care pharmacy practice focuses on patient centered care, comprehensive medication management, long-term relationships with patients, coordination of care, patient advocacy, wellness and health promotion, triage and referral, successful transitions, and patient education and self-management.

How Pharmacists Can Help: Achieving the Triple Aim

Pharmacists can develop, implement, and evaluate quality initiatives that improve the health of populations with chronic diseases. Common populations that pharmacists manage include anticoagulation, diabetes, dyslipidemia, hypertension, heart failure, COPD, asthma, pain, osteoporosis, geriatrics, and mental health, among many others. Various models of reimbursement exist for comprehensive medication management provided by pharmacists. Moreover, pharmacists help practices achieve quality metrics, which can enhance reimbursement through pay-for-performance measures.

Pharmacists Increase Patient Satisfaction

Pharmacists can increase patient satisfaction by addressing patients' questions and concerns regarding their medications and acknowledging each patients' unique medication experience.

Pharmacists Increase the Quality of Care

When pharmacists manage patients with chronic diseases, physicians are able to dedicate more time to the diagnostic and treatment selection process. For every **10 patient visits** with a clinical pharmacist, **8.2 physician/prescriber visits are avoided**, with a resulting cost savings per patient projected at nearly **\$700**. When pharmacists are added to an ambulatory care practice, they contribute to improved patient outcomes, impacting PQRSm measures, STAR ratings and meaningful use.

Pharmacists Reduce the Total Cost of Care

Incorporating pharmacists into ambulatory care teams to provide medication management services reduces hospital admissions, reduces unnecessary medications, and reduces emergency room visits. According to the Public Health Service Report to the Surgeon General, incorporating pharmacists into ambulatory care practices results in cost savings and a positive benefit to cost ratio. Specifically, pharmacists resulted in:

- Savings of over \$1600 per patient in direct healthcare costs in a pharmacist-managed anticoagulation clinic, compared with usual care
- Savings of \$1200-\$1872 per patient in direct healthcare costs for patients with diabetes enrolled in the Asheville Project®
- Savings of \$1230 per patient in indirect costs and \$725 per patient in direct cost savings for patients with asthma
- Decreased sick time of employees who participated in a pharmacist-managed disease management program
- A benefit to cost ratio of \$10.07 per \$1 of allocated funds

What does the ambulatory care pharmacy practice model look like?

Pharmacists who practice in ambulatory care provide direct patient care services for patients with chronic illnesses, promote health and wellness, and participate in innovative patient visits including transitions in care, group visits, patient education classes, shared visits, and Medicare Wellness Visits.

Patients may be referred to the pharmacist by the physician or other providers for comprehensive medication management, and pharmacists may also manage specific populations of patients. Pharmacists meet with patients by phone, in person, or via telehealth to manage medications in collaboration with the patient's physician. Encounters are documented in the medical record, and therapeutic plans are discussed with the healthcare team.

Ambulatory Care Pharmacists may have an expanded scope of practice depending on their state and practice location. Most states allow collaborative practice agreements with pharmacists and physicians which enable pharmacists to initiate, adjust, and discontinue medications, order and monitor laboratory studies, and perform limited physical assessment.

Getting Ready for an Ambulatory Care Pharmacy Practice Model

ASHP has published an *Ambulatory Care Self-Assessment Tool* that assists institutions and pharmacists with the implementation and evaluation of ambulatory care pharmacy services. In addition, ASHP convened an *Ambulatory Care Summit* in 2014, and ambulatory care experts from across the nation met to define ambulatory care practice and explore patient care models, sustainable business models, and outcomes evaluations for services. Proceedings from this meeting have been published, and serve as a national standard for ambulatory care practice.



The Ambulatory Care Pharmacist: A Member of My Healthcare Team at My Doctor's Office

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What is a Pharmacist?

Pharmacists are medication experts, and are the healthcare professional who knows the most about medication dosing, over-the-counter medicines, drug interactions, and side effects. Pharmacists are important members of your healthcare team.

How Long Does a Pharmacist Go to School?

Today's pharmacists spend four years in pharmacy school to receive their Doctor of Pharmacy degree. Many pharmacists also have an undergraduate degree in a field such as biology or chemistry. Pharmacists must pass two board examinations to be licensed to practice. They may choose to train for another 1-2 years as a pharmacy resident after graduating from pharmacy school to learn more about special areas of pharmacy such as:

- Geriatrics (older adults)
- Pediatrics (children)
- Ambulatory care
- Infectious disease
- Oncology (cancer)

What is Team Based Care?

There have been a lot of changes in healthcare recently with a focus on providing good, quality care for everyone. Because of these changes, more pharmacists are working in doctor's offices as part of a healthcare team.

Many doctor's offices and hospitals are working on being Patient Centered Medical Homes (PCMH) to make the care you get even better. Being "patient centered" means that you are involved in your own care to address your own needs, culture, values, and preferences as well as supporting so that you reach your healthcare goals. The PCMH includes a team of healthcare providers that work together to take care of your physical and mental healthcare needs, and often includes a pharmacist. When you have a team of healthcare providers all in one place, you get the best quality care and results.

What is an Ambulatory Care Pharmacist?

If you have ever had a prescription filled at your local pharmacy, you probably have an idea of what a pharmacist does. Filling prescriptions is an important part of a pharmacist's duties. However, pharmacists also work in many different places like doctor's offices, hospitals, nursing homes, managed care organizations, home healthcare facilities, home infusion facilities, and drug research and development. *Ambulatory care pharmacists* work in your doctor's office, and serve as an important member of your healthcare team.

What can an Ambulatory Care Pharmacist Do for You?

Your doctor may have you see an ambulatory care pharmacist to help take better care of you and to make sure that your medicines are right for you. An ambulatory care pharmacist works with you and your

doctor to make sure that your medicines are working well for you and aren't causing any problems. The pharmacist does not take the place of your doctor, and is an important healthcare professional to have on your team so that you can reach your healthcare goals. Some of the things that an ambulatory care pharmacist might do for you include:

- Reviewing all of your medicines with you to make sure that you are getting the most benefit from what you are taking
- Advising you on the safe use of over-the-counter medicines
- Ensuring that you do not have any drug interactions
- Helping you to find medicines that are affordable for you
- Adjusting your medicine doses to help you receive the most benefit
- Helping you organize your medicines so that you take them at the right time
- Teaching you about lifestyle changes that you can make to keep you healthy
- Supporting you as you stop smoking
- Advising your doctor about your medicines
- Ordering laboratory studies or other tests to monitor the effects of your medicines
- Recommending and administering vaccines

Why Should a Pharmacist be a Part of My Healthcare Team?

Many experts including the National Governors' Association and the Patient Centered Primary Care Collaborative have suggested that pharmacists be added onto healthcare teams. Having a pharmacist on your team has been proven to lower healthcare costs, improve the quality of care that you receive, and help you to be more satisfied with your healthcare services.

So, next time you are in your doctor's office ask "Where is my Ambulatory Care Pharmacist?" and let us take care of you and your medicines!