

Draft ASHP Statement on the Community Pharmacist’s Role in the Care Continuum

1 **Position**

2 The American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) believes that community
3 pharmacists are skilled clinicians who play an important role in the care continuum as equal,
4 essential, and valued members of the healthcare team. Community pharmacists provide direct
5 patient care, advance team-based care, manage patient-centered clinical services, and serve as
6 leaders within their communities and health systems. Community pharmacists optimize care by
7 providing educational consultations, medication optimization services, chronic condition
8 management, patient empowerment, wellness services, care coordination, and other services.

9 Community pharmacists lead teams that support patient access and safety through
10 medication preparation and dispensing services, regulatory compliance, operational efficiency,
11 and integration services across settings of care. Further, community pharmacists lead, manage,
12 and contribute to innovative practices and operations that advance pharmacy practice and
13 contribute to financial sustainability.

14 ASHP encourages healthcare leaders to utilize community pharmacists to the full extent
15 of their expertise and to continue to integrate them across the continuum of care. Community
16 pharmacists should be recognized as medication experts and accountable partners for optimal
17 health outcomes. ASHP urges community pharmacists and leaders to advocate for the value of
18 community pharmacists to internal and external stakeholders so their clinical and business
19 expertise can be recognized.

21 **Background**

22 Community pharmacy ranks among the most frequent consumer touch points in healthcare.
23 More than 90% of Americans live within 5 miles of a pharmacy,¹ and patients visit their
24 community pharmacist 12 times more frequently than their primary care provider.²
25 Community pharmacy practitioners are uniquely positioned to take an active role in improving
26 therapeutic outcomes and providing comprehensive and longitudinal patient-centered care.
27 According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly half of Americans use at
28 least one prescription medication each month,³ and 40% of U.S. adults are managing two or
29 more chronic conditions.⁴ Innovative community pharmacy practices have the potential to
30 make a significant impact on outcomes, such as reducing hospital readmission rates and
31 increasing medication access and adherence.⁵⁻⁷ Studies have also shown that community
32 pharmacist-led interventions have a positive impact on a wide range of chronic diseases,
33 including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hyperlipidemia, and HIV/AIDS, and have
34 demonstrated a decrease in medical and healthcare costs.⁸⁻¹⁰ As the healthcare landscape shifts
35 toward a value-based framework, there is general agreement on the favorable impact of
36 community pharmacists in increasing access to care and providing preventive health services.¹¹⁻

37 ¹⁶

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38 Core responsibilities

39 **Patient care.** Pharmacists practicing in community settings are uniquely suited to both
40 integrate into a specific patient care team and act as health and wellness advocates in their
41 locales. Community pharmacists are critical in ensuring that patients receive the medications
42 they need through patient-centered dispensing, while also providing a number of clinical
43 services that optimize patient care and outcomes. The following list encompasses the core
44 clinical responsibilities of community pharmacists.

- 45
- 46 **1. Holistic patient management:** Patients may routinely seek care from many different
47 sources but often choose to use a single pharmacy for prescriptions. Community
48 pharmacists should leverage this cohesion of information to optimize the patient's
49 medication therapies. Because community pharmacists may have the most complete list
50 of a patient's medications, they should utilize this list to ensure that each medication is
51 an appropriate agent, prescribed at an appropriate dose and for an appropriate
52 duration. Information elucidated in this holistic patient care approach should be
53 communicated to the patient's entire healthcare team, reducing the risk for adverse
54 outcomes related to incomplete understanding of the patient's medication regimen.
 - 55 **2. Medication access:** Community pharmacists can identify and help resolve medication
56 access barriers. No other care setting offers the opportunity to routinely identify and
57 overcome barriers to medication access such as cost, availability, and dosage form
58 modifications. During dispensing and at the point of sale, community pharmacists have
59 the opportunity to engage the patient in a discussion regarding affordability of and
60 access to their medications. These discussions should incorporate manufacturer
61 discount programs, therapeutic interchanges, or use of charitable resources. In addition,
62 programs offered by community pharmacists (e.g., medication bedside delivery in acute
63 care settings and home delivery in ambulatory care settings) can overcome
64 transportation-related access barriers.
 - 65 **3. Medication therapy management:** Community pharmacy practitioners are trained to
66 assess and improve medication regimens. Community pharmacists can provide
67 medication therapy management services to patients, including comprehensive
68 medication reviews, transitions of care assessments, and medication reconciliation. In
69 addition, community pharmacists can integrate targeted services such as medication
70 adherence support, therapeutic optimization, reversal agent access, and duplicative
71 therapy adjustments into their daily workflow.
 - 72 **4. Point-of-care testing and treatment:** Advances in technology have increased availability
73 of testing that can be done outside laboratories, increasing access and convenience for
74 patients. The advent of direct-to-consumer testing has spurred a need for healthcare
75 professionals to assist in interpreting test results and formulating next steps.
76 Community pharmacists can offer support to patients by performing and interpreting
77 point-of-care testing, including pharmacogenomics testing, and assisting patients in
78 understanding test results. In addition, community health screening events offer a
79 mechanism for community pharmacists to identify patients in need of additional

80 assessment and treatment for previously undiagnosed conditions (e.g., high blood
81 pressure, hyperlipidemia, diabetes).

- 82 **5. Wellness care/vaccinations/travel consultations:** Community pharmacists are in a
83 position to support patient wellness, both in a usual or daily setting and when patients
84 will be exposed to new or potentially hazardous conditions. Wellness care can involve
85 preventive interventions (e.g., Medicare Wellness Visits, health screenings) or travel
86 consultations to prepare travelers for pathogens and adverse conditions they may
87 encounter abroad.
- 88 **6. Counseling/patient education/community outreach:** Community pharmacists have
89 chosen to practice in a setting that enables them to be a resource for patient education
90 on many different levels. This role includes not only patient education and counseling
91 regarding specific medications or prescriptions but also more comprehensive
92 medication education (e.g., storage, appropriate administration, safe combinations with
93 other medications or supplements, recommended disposal). It also includes acting as
94 educational resources for the broader community during health screenings, drug take-
95 back events, and community wellness and outreach events.
- 96 **7. Medication safety:** Community pharmacists serve as advocates for the safe use of
97 medications. The interventions of community pharmacists are highly impactful on
98 patient safety, whether this is in implementation of the Institute for Safe Medication
99 Practices labeling recommendations for high-alert medications in
100 community/ambulatory settings,¹⁷ recognition and mitigation of dangerous drug-drug or
101 drug-disease interactions, or ensuring a patient's understanding of their medication
102 regimen. Community pharmacists can also support safe use of medications by working
103 on a broader scale within their organizations to perform continuous quality
104 improvement processes and providing medication safety resources for other healthcare
105 disciplines.

106
107 **Operations.** In addition to core patient care responsibilities, community pharmacists in
108 outpatient pharmacies are responsible for day-to-day operations of the pharmacy and ensuring
109 compliance with state and federal laws and regulations, as well as accreditation standards. The
110 following encompasses the core operations of the community pharmacy, which the pharmacist
111 supports:

- 112 **1. Team supervision:** Community pharmacists are in charge of daily operations, including
113 day-to-day staffing levels and maintaining appropriate pharmacist to technician staffing
114 ratios, developing workstation and workflow expectations and optimizations, and
115 supervising learners.
- 116 **2. Regulatory compliance:** Community pharmacists ensure compliance with all
117 regulations, including all state and federal laws, Drug Enforcement Administration
118 regulations, Combat Methamphetamine Act (CMEA) requirements, applicable United
119 States Pharmacopeia (USP) standards (e.g., USP 795, USP 800), 340B program
120 compliance as applicable, and additional requirements of accreditation and governing
121 bodies as applicable.

- 122 **3. Record-keeping:** Community pharmacists maintain all records (e.g., inventory,
123 dispensing) in compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act
124 of 1996 (HIPAA), state, and federal regulations.
- 125 **4. Inventory management:** Community pharmacists manage the pharmacy's inventory to
126 ensure the needs of the patients are served while preventing an excess surplus of
127 inventory. Inventory management includes examination of inventory turns, proper
128 security and storage of medications, and proper inventory management practices as it
129 relates to the 340B program.
- 130 **5. Fiscal management:** Community pharmacists manage billing, revenue cycles, inventory
131 costs, labor, and operational expenses in a fiscally responsible way. Community
132 pharmacists should also be able to develop annual budgets and create volume
133 projections for the pharmacy.
- 134 **6. Compounding:** Compounding services should be offered to patients, since some
135 formulations may be difficult to access. If the community pharmacy is part of a health
136 system, compounded sterile preparations available to patients when admitted to the
137 hospital should be available in the community pharmacy for continuation of therapy.
- 138 **7. Program and protocol development:** Community pharmacies offer relevant services
139 such as vaccination and meds-to-beds services as applicable. Additional clinical services
140 should be considered, such as implementation of standing orders or collaborative
141 practice agreements as allowed by state and federal laws (e.g., hormonal contraception
142 prescribing, smoking cessation), medication synchronization, medication adherence
143 packaging, and medication delivery programs.
- 144 **8. Customer service:** Community pharmacists provide excellent customer service not only
145 to patients and customers but also to internal providers and stakeholders in the
146 organization. Pharmacists can connect with the patient's providers in the event of a
147 drug shortage to determine alternatives, as needed to navigate insurance restrictions,
148 and to accommodate financial restrictions limiting patient access.
- 149 **9. Access to health data:** Community pharmacists, especially those integrated within a
150 health system, should have access to the patient's electronic health record (EHR) and
151 pursue access to health information exchange (HIE) platforms. Likewise, community
152 pharmacy dispensing records should be accessible in the EHR.
- 153 **10. Health equity and health literacy:** Patients should have the ability to access community
154 pharmacy services easily within their communities and by different means (in person or
155 remotely). In addition, prescription labels and care notes should be provided in the
156 patient's preferred language, at an appropriate reading level, and utilizing the patient's
157 preferred name.
- 158 **11. Drug disposal:** With the rise of the opioid epidemic and overdoses, community
159 pharmacies serve as drug disposal sites, allowing patients to safely dispose of unwanted
160 medications.

161

162 **Expanded roles**

163 While the clinical and operational functions described above are fundamental in today's
164 practice for community pharmacists, there are many opportunities to expand how community

165 pharmacists demonstrate value in providing direct patient care. Community pharmacists are
 166 poised to expand their roles due to their accessibility, in-depth knowledge of the medication-
 167 use process, and ability to quickly pivot and adapt to the changing healthcare landscape (Table
 168 1).

169

170 **Table 1. Domains of opportunity for community pharmacist expanded roles.**

Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the use of and design new collaborative practice agreements. • Provide access to point-of-care testing for a variety of disease states (e.g., influenza, group A <i>Streptococcus</i>, human immunodeficiency virus, hepatitis C, coronaviruses, and chronic diseases). • Health and wellness initiatives for patients (e.g., smoking cessation, weight management, asthma, chronic heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, hyperlipidemia, hypertension, patient management, anticoagulation, medication adherence). • Promotion of preventive care such as establishing a primary provider and health screenings.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a safe and welcoming space for transgender care by educating clinicians and the public. • Overcome barriers that cause health inequities in patient care.
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand or partner in developing precision medicine and pharmacogenomics opportunities. • Develop and evaluate artificial intelligence and cognitive support tools. • Support patients in their wellness journey by use of technology such as health apps, wearable devices, and other tools.
Patient-centric models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform ongoing evaluations of the patient-centered medical home model or hospital-at-home services. • Offer clinical services through in person, health applications and patient portals, and telehealth options.
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with clinicians to increase pharmacy-offered clinical services to avoid provider burnout. • Enhance the patient experience by offering a team-based approach to the continuum of care. • Identify opportunities that not only advance patient care but also increase the pharmacy department’s financial contribution to the organization.
Population health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate and investigate community health issues. • Educate the community about public health.
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue opportunities to participate in research.

- | | |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage patient and clinician participation in research.• Contribute through data collection. |
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171

172 To be successful in the development of expanded roles for community pharmacy practitioners,
173 all pharmacy team members must be trailblazers, early adopters of practice change, and
174 actively advocating for pharmacy practice advancement.

175

176 **Practice challenges**

177 Although community pharmacists are well-equipped to improve therapeutic outcomes and
178 patient care, a few practice challenges exist. Declining reimbursements to pharmacies by
179 insurance plans have become increasingly problematic. Since the establishment of
180 performance-based pharmacy contracts by the Medicare Part D plans in 2012, price
181 concessions charged to pharmacies by insurance plans and pharmacy benefit managers
182 increased 170%.¹⁸ Further, limited payment of pharmacists for clinical services has led to
183 serious financial strains for community pharmacies. Studies showed that 1 in 8 pharmacies
184 closed between 2009 and 2015, a statistic that disproportionately affected independent
185 pharmacies and low-income neighborhoods.¹⁹

186 Limited revenue for community pharmacies has further been aggravated by a changing
187 economy and workforce. In a recent report by the National Community Pharmacy Association,
188 93% of community pharmacists noted their business was affected by inflation. Concurrently,
189 90% of respondents indicated being affected by supply chain shortages brought by the COVID-
190 19 pandemic, and more than three quarters of community pharmacists have trouble filling
191 open positions.²⁰

192 Staffing shortages and financial strains impact care. Despite increasing evidence favoring
193 community pharmacist involvement in advanced clinical services, uptake is slow. The 2019
194 National Pharmacist Workforce Study²¹ found that services such as vaccinations, medication
195 assistance programs, medication therapy management, and medication synchronization are
196 offered in most community pharmacy sites. However, only 43% of community pharmacy
197 respondents indicated that they provide comprehensive medication management, 25% opioid
198 de-prescribing, 24% disease state management, 20% point-of-care testing, 19% injection
199 administration, and 4% pharmacogenomics testing. The study also identified high workload and
200 inadequate staffing as the top two stressors for pharmacists.

201

202 **Leveraging pharmacy technicians**

203 As community pharmacists face increased workload demands and limited time, pharmacy
204 technicians could be utilized as pharmacist extenders, furthering pharmacy practice and patient
205 care.²²⁻²⁴

206 Traditional community pharmacy technician roles include entering prescriptions into the
207 pharmacy dispensing system, counting medications, compounding, managing inventory, dealing
208 with billing issues and insurances, and providing customer service at the point of sale. While
209 essential, limiting pharmacy technicians to only these roles does not utilize their full potential.²³
210 Nontraditional and advanced roles for pharmacy technicians can contribute to the overall

211 impact of community pharmacy practice in patient care.^{22,25-28} Some of these advanced
 212 pharmacy technician responsibilities are listed in Table 2.

213

214 **Table 2. Advanced pharmacy technician responsibilities in community pharmacy.**

Patient care responsibilities	Operational responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administer immunizations and promote vaccine confidence. • Collect medication history and perform medication reconciliation. • Conduct point-of-care tests. • Identify and resolve social barriers to medication access or care. • Serve as patient advocate. • Assist with patient adherence efforts. • Leverage patient relationships to promote preventative and essential health services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product verification (and tech-check-tech). • Inventory management. • 340B coordination. • Manage billing, prior authorizations, and financial affairs. • Manage pharmacist’s schedule and consultations. • Supervise staff. • Peer education and training. • Gather data and generate metrics and reports. • Oversee medication inventory and surveillance. • Assist in pharmacy workflow optimization. • Contribute to continuous quality improvement and patient safety efforts.

215

216 By redesigning the pharmacy workflow and using pharmacy technicians as pharmacist
 217 extenders, community pharmacies can optimize the pharmacists’ accessibility and provide
 218 quality healthcare to their communities. Community pharmacists and leaders should support
 219 advanced community pharmacy technician training opportunities, which will allow pharmacy
 220 technicians to elevate their practice and contribute to advanced roles.

221

222 **Professional obligations of community pharmacy practitioners**

223 Community pharmacist have the opportunity to make a tremendous, positive impact in patient
 224 care and the communities they serve. To overcome the financial and workforce challenges
 225 currently impacting care, community pharmacists have a professional obligation to be
 226 advocates for the pharmacy profession and their practice in the following ways:

- 227 • Community pharmacists should engage in advocacy efforts, through state and national
 228 partners, to advance and protect the interests of patient care and the pharmacy
 229 profession.
- 230 • Community pharmacists should continue to pursue educational and training
 231 opportunities that further their clinical and professional skills.
- 232 • Community pharmacists should seek opportunities to engage in advanced roles that
 233 optimize patient outcomes, patient safety, operational efficiencies, and fiscal health for
 234 their patients and organizations.

- 235 • Community pharmacists should commit to being innovators, who adapt to and lead
236 contemporary models of care.
- 237 • Community pharmacists should act as positive and ethical role models for their patients,
238 colleagues, and the community.
- 239 • Community pharmacists should serve as mentors and educators for student pharmacists
240 and pharmacy residents, contributing to succession planning for a diverse and healthy
241 workforce.
- 242 • Community pharmacists should encourage the advancement and recognition of
243 pharmacy technician partners.
- 244

245 **Conclusion**

246 The role of community pharmacists has evolved significantly. Pharmacists in community-based
247 settings are operational leaders for the financial sustainability of healthcare institutions as well
248 as valuable clinicians in providing comprehensive management of patient's medication therapy
249 in collaboration with other healthcare colleagues.

Authors

Melissa Ortega, PharmD, MS, FASHP*

System Vice President, Ambulatory Pharmacy Services
Tufts Medicine
Boston, MA

Courtney Isom, PharmD, BCACP, CPP*

Pharmacy Administrative Coordinator
Cone Health Community Pharmacy at Wendover Medical Center
Greensboro, NC

Amanda Place, PharmD, BCACP*

Ambulatory Care Clinical Pharmacy Specialist
Ascension St. Vincent Joshua Max Simon Primary Care Center
Indianapolis, IN

Jordan Rush, PharmD, MS*

Director, System Retail and Outpatient Pharmacy
UNC Health
Chapel Hill, NC

Ashley Storvick, PharmD, MBA*

Director of Pharmacy, Ambulatory Service
Advocate Aurora Health
Milwaukee, WI

Georgia G. Luchen, PharmD

Director, Member Relations
Section of Community Pharmacy Practitioners

Section of Pharmacy Educators
ASHP
Bethesda, MD

*Member of the ASHP Section of Community Pharmacy Practitioners Executive Committee 2022-2023.

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Additional information

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