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

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

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

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

Background
Community pharmacy ranks among the most frequent consumer touch points in healthcare. More than 90% of Americans live within 5 miles of a pharmacy, and patients visit their community pharmacist 12 times more frequently than their primary care provider.

Community pharmacy practitioners are uniquely positioned to take an active role in improving therapeutic outcomes and providing comprehensive and longitudinal patient-centered care. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly half of Americans use at least one prescription medication each month, and 40% of U.S. adults are managing two or more chronic conditions. Innovative community pharmacy practices have the potential to make a significant impact on outcomes, such as reducing hospital readmission rates and increasing medication access and adherence.

Studies have also shown that community pharmacist-led interventions have a positive impact on a wide range of chronic diseases, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hyperlipidemia, and HIV/AIDS, and have demonstrated a decrease in medical and healthcare costs. As the healthcare landscape shifts toward a value-based framework, there is general agreement on the favorable impact of community pharmacists in increasing access to care and providing preventive health services.

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Core responsibilities

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

1. **Holistic patient management:** Patients may routinely seek care from many different sources but often choose to use a single pharmacy for prescriptions. Community pharmacists should leverage this cohesion of information to optimize the patient’s medication therapies. Because community pharmacists may have the most complete list of a patient’s medications, they should utilize this list to ensure that each medication is an appropriate agent, prescribed at an appropriate dose and for an appropriate duration. Information elucidated in this holistic patient care approach should be communicated to the patient’s entire healthcare team, reducing the risk for adverse outcomes related to incomplete understanding of the patient’s medication regimen.

2. **Medication access:** Community pharmacists can identify and help resolve medication access barriers. No other care setting offers the opportunity to routinely identify and overcome barriers to medication access such as cost, availability, and dosage form modifications. During dispensing and at the point of sale, community pharmacists have the opportunity to engage the patient in a discussion regarding affordability of and access to their medications. These discussions should incorporate manufacturer discount programs, therapeutic interchanges, or use of charitable resources. In addition, programs offered by community pharmacists (e.g., medication bedside delivery in acute care settings and home delivery in ambulatory care settings) can overcome transportation-related access barriers.

3. **Medication therapy management:** Community pharmacy practitioners are trained to assess and improve medication regimens. Community pharmacists can provide medication therapy management services to patients, including comprehensive medication reviews, transitions of care assessments, and medication reconciliation. In addition, community pharmacists can integrate targeted services such as medication adherence support, therapeutic optimization, reversal agent access, and duplicative therapy adjustments into their daily workflow.

4. **Point-of-care testing and treatment:** Advances in technology have increased availability of testing that can be done outside laboratories, increasing access and convenience for patients. The advent of direct-to-consumer testing has spurred a need for healthcare professionals to assist in interpreting test results and formulating next steps. Community pharmacists can offer support to patients by performing and interpreting point-of-care testing, including pharmacogenomics testing, and assisting patients in understanding test results. In addition, community health screening events offer a mechanism for community pharmacists to identify patients in need of additional
assessment and treatment for previously undiagnosed conditions (e.g., high blood pressure, hyperlipidemia, diabetes).

5. **Wellness care/vaccinations/travel consultations:** Community pharmacists are in a position to support patient wellness, both in a usual or daily setting and when patients will be exposed to new or potentially hazardous conditions. Wellness care can involve preventive interventions (e.g., Medicare Wellness Visits, health screenings) or travel consultations to prepare travelers for pathogens and adverse conditions they may encounter abroad.

6. **Counseling/patient education/community outreach:** Community pharmacists have chosen to practice in a setting that enables them to be a resource for patient education on many different levels. This role includes not only patient education and counseling regarding specific medications or prescriptions but also more comprehensive medication education (e.g., storage, appropriate administration, safe combinations with other medications or supplements, recommended disposal). It also includes acting as educational resources for the broader community during health screenings, drug take-back events, and community wellness and outreach events.

7. **Medication safety:** Community pharmacists serve as advocates for the safe use of medications. The interventions of community pharmacists are highly impactful on patient safety, whether this is in implementation of the Institute for Safe Medication Practices labeling recommendations for high-alert medications in community/ambulatory settings, recognition and mitigation of dangerous drug-drug or drug-disease interactions, or ensuring a patient’s understanding of their medication regimen. Community pharmacists can also support safe use of medications by working on a broader scale within their organizations to perform continuous quality improvement processes and providing medication safety resources for other healthcare disciplines.

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

1. **Team supervision:** Community pharmacists are in charge of daily operations, including day-to-day staffing levels and maintaining appropriate pharmacist to technician staffing ratios, developing workstation and workflow expectations and optimizations, and supervising learners.

2. **Regulatory compliance:** Community pharmacists ensure compliance with all regulations, including all state and federal laws, Drug Enforcement Administration regulations, Combat Methamphetamine Act (CMEA) requirements, applicable United States Pharmacopeia (USP) standards (e.g., USP 795, USP 800), 340B program compliance as applicable, and additional requirements of accreditation and governing bodies as applicable.
3. **Record-keeping**: Community pharmacists maintain all records (e.g., inventory, dispensing) in compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), state, and federal regulations.

4. **Inventory management**: Community pharmacists manage the pharmacy’s inventory to ensure the needs of the patients are served while preventing an excess surplus of inventory. Inventory management includes examination of inventory turns, proper security and storage of medications, and proper inventory management practices as it relates to the 340B program.

5. **Fiscal management**: Community pharmacists manage billing, revenue cycles, inventory costs, labor, and operational expenses in a fiscally responsible way. Community pharmacists should also be able to develop annual budgets and create volume projections for the pharmacy.

6. **Compounding**: Compounding services should be offered to patients, since some formulations may be difficult to access. If the community pharmacy is part of a health system, compounded sterile preparations available to patients when admitted to the hospital should be available in the community pharmacy for continuation of therapy.

7. **Program and protocol development**: Community pharmacies offer relevant services such as vaccination and meds-to-beds services as applicable. Additional clinical services should be considered, such as implementation of standing orders or collaborative practice agreements as allowed by state and federal laws (e.g., hormonal contraception prescribing, smoking cessation), medication synchronization, medication adherence packaging, and medication delivery programs.

8. **Customer service**: Community pharmacists provide excellent customer service not only to patients and customers but also to internal providers and stakeholders in the organization. Pharmacists can connect with the patient’s providers in the event of a drug shortage to determine alternatives, as needed to navigate insurance restrictions, and to accommodate financial restrictions limiting patient access.

9. **Access to health data**: Community pharmacists, especially those integrated within a health system, should have access to the patient’s electronic health record (EHR) and pursue access to health information exchange (HIE) platforms. Likewise, community pharmacy dispensing records should be accessible in the EHR.

10. **Health equity and health literacy**: Patients should have the ability to access community pharmacy services easily within their communities and by different means (in person or remotely). In addition, prescription labels and care notes should be provided in the patient’s preferred language, at an appropriate reading level, and utilizing the patient’s preferred name.

11. **Drug disposal**: With the rise of the opioid epidemic and overdoses, community pharmacies serve as drug disposal sites, allowing patients to safely dispose of unwanted medications.

**Expanded roles**

While the clinical and operational functions described above are fundamental in today’s practice for community pharmacists, there are many opportunities to expand how community
pharmacists demonstrate value in providing direct patient care. Community pharmacists are poised to expand their roles due to their accessibility, in-depth knowledge of the medication-use process, and ability to quickly pivot and adapt to the changing healthcare landscape (Table 1).

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

| Accessibility | • 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 Streptococcus, 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 | • 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 | • 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 | • 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 | • 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 | • Evaluate and investigate community health issues.  
| | • Educate the community about public health.  
| Research | • Pursue opportunities to participate in research.
To be successful in the development of expanded roles for community pharmacy practitioners, all pharmacy team members must be trailblazers, early adopters of practice change, and actively advocating for pharmacy practice advancement.

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

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

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

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

Traditional community pharmacy technician roles include entering prescriptions into the pharmacy dispensing system, counting medications, compounding, managing inventory, dealing with billing issues and insurances, and providing customer service at the point of sale. While essential, limiting pharmacy technicians to only these roles does not utilize their full potential.23 Nontraditional and advanced roles for pharmacy technicians can contribute to the overall...
impact of community pharmacy practice in patient care. Some of these advanced pharmacy technician responsibilities are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Advanced pharmacy technician responsibilities in community pharmacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patient care responsibilities</th>
<th>Operational responsibilities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Administer immunizations and promote vaccine confidence.</td>
<td>• Product verification (and tech-check-tech).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Collect medication history and perform medication reconciliation.</td>
<td>• Inventory management.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Conduct point-of-care tests.</td>
<td>• 340B coordination.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Identify and resolve social barriers to medication access or care.</td>
<td>• Manage billing, prior authorizations, and financial affairs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Serve as patient advocate.</td>
<td>• Manage pharmacist’s schedule and consultations.</td>
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<td>• Assist with patient adherence efforts.</td>
<td>• Supervise staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Leverage patient relationships to promote preventative and essential health services.</td>
<td>• Peer education and training.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Gather data and generate metrics and reports.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Oversee medication inventory and surveillance.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Assist in pharmacy workflow optimization.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Contribute to continuous quality improvement and patient safety efforts.</td>
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By redesigning the pharmacy workflow and using pharmacy technicians as pharmacist extenders, community pharmacies can optimize the pharmacists’ accessibility and provide quality healthcare to their communities. Community pharmacists and leaders should support advanced community pharmacy technician training opportunities, which will allow pharmacy technicians to elevate their practice and contribute to advanced roles.

Professional obligations of community pharmacy practitioners

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

• Community pharmacists should engage in advocacy efforts, through state and national partners, to advance and protect the interests of patient care and the pharmacy profession.

• Community pharmacists should continue to pursue educational and training opportunities that further their clinical and professional skills.

• Community pharmacists should seek opportunities to engage in advanced roles that optimize patient outcomes, patient safety, operational efficiencies, and fiscal health for their patients and organizations.
Community pharmacists should commit to being innovators, who adapt to and lead contemporary models of care.

Community pharmacists should act as positive and ethical role models for their patients, colleagues, and the community.

Community pharmacists should serve as mentors and educators for student pharmacists and pharmacy residents, contributing to succession planning for a diverse and healthy workforce.

Community pharmacists should encourage the advancement and recognition of pharmacy technician partners.

Conclusion

The role of community pharmacists has evolved significantly. Pharmacists in community-based settings are operational leaders for the financial sustainability of healthcare institutions as well as valuable clinicians in providing comprehensive management of patient’s medication therapy 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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References


