

ASHP Statement on Standards-Based Pharmacy Practice in Hospitals and Health Systems

Position

Pharmacy practice leaders in hospitals and health systems have a distinguished history of advancing health-system pharmacy practice beyond the minimum required by law, regulation, and accreditation. The American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) supports those efforts by developing and disseminating a comprehensive body of evidence-based, peer-reviewed descriptions of best practices in health-system pharmacy. ASHP believes that pharmacists who practice in hospitals and health systems (“health-system pharmacists”) and pharmacy leaders in health systems can continuously improve the delivery of patient care by regularly assessing compliance with ASHP best practices, identifying gaps in practice, establishing practice improvement priorities appropriate for their unique circumstances, and working to close the targeted gaps.

Purpose

The purpose of this statement is to promote understanding of how health-system pharmacists use ASHP best practices to develop and promote in health systems a standard of practice that exceeds what is required by law, regulation, or accreditation.

Standards-Based Pharmacy Practice

A standard is “a statement that defines the performance expectations, structures, or processes that must be in place for an organization to provide safe and high quality care, treatment, and service.”¹ In health care, practice standards serve as guideposts for a profession and as a way of communicating to peers, patients, policymakers, other professionals, and the public the roles and responsibilities of members of the profession. Practice standards also provide a benchmark for evaluating the quality of services and patient care.

Health-system pharmacists, like other health care professionals, practice under a number of mandated standards. These standards include state board of pharmacy regulations, public health requirements, Drug Enforcement Administration regulations, Joint Commission accreditation standards, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services conditions of participation, and the standards of other accrediting bodies and professional associations. Individual health care organizations also develop their own interdisciplinary practice policies and standards of care related to medication use, with health-system pharmacists serving as key participants in their development.

ASHP members have invested decades of effort in developing and maintaining an extensive body of policy positions, statements, and guidelines (hereinafter “ASHP best practices”) that serve as a guide for effective, high-quality pharmacy practice in hospitals and health systems.² This comprehensive set of policies is unique in pharmacy.

ASHP best practices reinforce health-system pharmacists’ established roles in health care and encourage development of responsibilities that answer the growing need and public demand for expanded involvement of pharmacists in patient care. ASHP best practices are based on professional and scientific literature and are developed with input from ASHP members, the public, regulatory bodies, other professional associations, and representatives of other health care disciplines. Peer groups of ASHP expert members systematically review ASHP best practices and compare them with the existing literature, the changing expectations of society, and changes in the professional and ethical challenges faced by health-system pharmacists. A compilation of these documents is published annually as *Best Practices for Hospital and Health-System Pharmacy* and made available to the public (www.ashp.org/bestpractices).

Most ASHP best practices represent the professional beliefs and aspirations of pharmacists practicing in health systems, based on evidence and expert opinion. Only three ASHP guidelines describe a minimum level of practice that all hospital pharmacy departments should consistently provide; these guidelines are designated as ASHP minimum standards.³⁻⁵ Institutions that offer ASHP-accredited residencies are required to meet ASHP best practices to ensure the quality of the educational experience.

ASHP best practices represent a commitment by ASHP members to advancing the standard of pharmacy practice. ASHP believes that all health-system pharmacists have a role to play in raising health-system pharmacy practice to a level consistent with the best practices that have been developed and have gained acceptance by a peer-reviewed, consensus-based process. Practicing pharmacists and pharmacy leaders in health systems should use their professional judgment to regularly assess compliance with ASHP best practices, identify gaps in practice in their settings, establish practice improvement priorities appropriate for their unique circumstances, and work to close those practice gaps to ensure continuous improvement in the delivery of patient care.

Conclusion

Health-system pharmacy practice leaders have a long tradition of striving to advance practice beyond the minimum required by law, regulation, and accreditation. ASHP best practices embody those aspirations and provide health-system pharmacists with a means to continuously improve the delivery of patient care.

References

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