



COMMUNITY PHARMACISTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PATIENT CARE SERVICES

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Abstract:

Background: The increasing prevalence of chronic diseases necessitates enhanced access to patient care services (PCS) within the healthcare system. Community pharmacies are evolving to provide patient-centric services beyond traditional dispensing, focusing on improving clinical outcomes and addressing social determinants of health. However, challenges such as reimbursement issues and resource constraints hinder the effective delivery of PCS by community pharmacists.

Objective: This review aims to explore community pharmacists' attitudes towards providing PCS, identify barriers faced in delivering such services, assess satisfaction levels, and understand training needs for effective service provision.

Conclusion: Community pharmacists play a crucial role in patient care services, offering personalized healthcare solutions and promoting optimal outcomes. To overcome barriers and enhance service delivery, pharmacists must engage in continuous education, strengthen communication skills, foster interdisciplinary collaboration, prioritize patient safety and confidentiality, adhere to regulatory standards, and leverage technology and innovation. By implementing these recommendations, community pharmacists can elevate their role in advancing patient care and improving health outcomes for individuals and communities.

Keywords: community pharmacy services, medication, therapy, management, sustainable business models.

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Introduction:

The escalation of chronic illnesses underscores the growing need for enhanced accessibility to patient care services (PCS) within a framework that manages costs, enhances healthcare outcomes, and references [1]. Healthcare providers leverage PCS to concentrate on a patient's well-being, ensuring a comprehensive approach that encompasses all facets of their health [2]. Within the realm of community pharmacy, PCS refer to services that extend beyond product dispensing, focusing instead on tailoring interventions to meet individual clinical objectives [3]. Emphasizing a patient-centric model, this strategy aims to fortify patient-provider relationships, address medical diagnoses, and extend support to encompass broader health determinants such as social factors. In the United States, this approach encounters significant challenges, including issues related to medical coverage, escalating healthcare expenses, and access barriers compared to other OECD nations [4]. In response to these challenges, community pharmacies are evolving their service delivery models, either by integrating horizontally into larger healthcare systems or vertically by incorporating new care services within their premises [5]. The evolving role of community pharmacies has become indispensable, particularly for individuals managing multiple chronic conditions and complex medication regimens [6]. Notably, Fay et al. observed that individuals requiring intensive medication management visit their local pharmacy 20–35 times annually, underscoring the critical role pharmacies play in serving high-risk populations [7]. Pharmacists, equipped to engage in numerous patient interactions daily, are pivotal in coordinating care for these vulnerable patients [8]. To enhance their services, pharmacies are now focusing on training staff on social determinants of health, collaborating with local health and social services, and proactively addressing public health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic [9]. By redefining pharmacists' roles, there is potential to address patient challenges effectively, expanding service accessibility to encompass a broader spectrum of health-related issues beyond clinical diagnoses.

Objectives:

The main objectives of this review are:

1. To explore community pharmacists' attitudes towards providing patient care services.
2. To identify the barriers and challenges faced by community pharmacists in delivering patient care services.

3. To assess the level of satisfaction and perceived impact of patient care services on community pharmacists.
4. To understand the training and resources needed for community pharmacists to effectively provide patient care services.

Perceptions of the pharmacy profession:

The existing perceptions surrounding the pharmacy profession exhibit a wide range of viewpoints, contingent upon whether one considers the stance of patients or providers. Patients exhibit a keen interest in actively involving pharmacists in their personal health matters, largely owing to the convenience, established rapport, and profound understanding pharmacists possess regarding medications. However, patients often lack a comprehensive grasp of the extensive range of Patient Care Services (PCS) that pharmacists can offer. Notably, a study by Smith et al. found that patients frequently overlook seeking medication counseling from community pharmacists, attributing this behavior to the ambiguous perceptions regarding pharmacists in non-dispensing roles [10]. The conventional model of pharmacy primarily revolves around dispensing medications, functioning downstream from providers with prescribing privileges.

The integration of PCS signifies a pivotal shift towards heightened pharmacist engagement in patient care delivery and outcomes. A key discovery underscored in research is the prevalent gap in comprehension regarding the role of community pharmacists within the healthcare team. To bridge this gap effectively, it is imperative for pharmacists to foster provider engagement and collaborative efforts when implementing PCS. Strategies such as marketing these services and emphasizing provider engagement are crucial steps towards advancing this evolution. Turner et al. accentuate the significance of leveraging pre-existing relationships, frequent interactions, and the cultivation of multiple relationships, such as collaborating on shared clinical interventions, to fortify provider collaborations within the realm of PCS [11].

Advocacy and professionalism emerge as pivotal themes that resonate strongly among many community pharmacists. Given the regulatory framework underpinning the American pharmacy profession, participants express a collective aspiration to actively engage and encourage others to partake in professional involvement [12]. While incremental progress has been achieved, there

remains a pressing need for further advancements to operate at an optimal level within the profession.

The role of community pharmacists in patient care services:

The significance of pharmacists has been perceived from various perspectives, encompassing both clinical and public viewpoints. In the United States, pharmacists are actively working to reshape the community's perception that their role is solely centered around medication provision. This ongoing transformation is characterized by a shift from a conventional "product-centric" approach to a more patient-centered model [13]. Enhanced education in crucial areas like social determinants of health has enabled community pharmacies to integrate services that extend beyond traditional clinical boundaries into their operational framework. Examples of such services include facilitating referrals to health and social services, educating patients on medications and health conditions, and administering care programs with dedicated staff care managers available for patient support [14].

By cultivating a safer environment that encourages patients to seek clinical assistance during critical moments, particularly in the context of the increasingly complex medical landscape, community pharmacies can potentially alter patients' perceptions of their interactions with these establishments. Often serving as the initial point of contact for individuals seeking medical advice or treatment for minor ailments, community pharmacists are well-equipped to offer valuable insights on over-the-counter and prescription medications, as well as address general health-related inquiries. Beyond medication dispensing, they deliver a spectrum of clinical services, including medication therapy management, immunizations, health screenings, and chronic disease management. Through close collaboration with patients, physicians, and other healthcare professionals, community pharmacists play a pivotal role in ensuring that patients receive comprehensive and coordinated care [15].

Furthermore, community pharmacists are instrumental in promoting medication adherence and safety by counseling patients on appropriate medication usage, potential side effects, and drug interactions. They collaborate with healthcare teams to monitor patients' progress, make necessary adjustments to medication regimens, and identify potential issues that may arise during treatment. Acting as advocates for patient health and well-being, community pharmacists are

dedicated to enhancing health outcomes and improving the quality of life for individuals within their communities. Their contributions extend beyond the confines of traditional pharmacy settings, as they actively engage with patients to educate them on disease prevention, healthy lifestyle choices, and self-care practices. Through their expertise and unwavering commitment, community pharmacists significantly impact the healthcare system by fostering optimal patient outcomes, reducing healthcare costs, and enhancing public health [15].

In summary, the multifaceted and indispensable role of community pharmacists in patient care services underscores their value as essential resources for individuals seeking personalized and comprehensive healthcare solutions. Their dedication to excellence, patient-centered care, and continuous professional advancement highlights their pivotal position within the healthcare landscape. As integral members of the healthcare team, community pharmacists play a crucial role in advancing patient care and fostering improved health outcomes for both individuals and communities [16].

Barriers and challenges faced by community pharmacists in delivering patient care services:

The ongoing exploration of patient-centric and service-based models within American community pharmacies is hindered by various barriers. One significant obstacle is the lack of reimbursement for Patient Care Services (PCS) from third-party payers, as community pharmacies are not recognized as providers under the Medicare Part B program, leading to a shortfall in payment for PCS [17].

Contracts for prescription payment are typically managed by Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs), acting as intermediaries in healthcare. Reimbursement for American community pharmacies primarily comprises two components: a dispensing fee and the cost of prescription drugs [18]. Negotiations for reimbursement rates with community pharmacies are commonly conducted by private and public third-party payers, including Medicare Part D, through PBMs. However, community pharmacies often struggle to secure fair rates that adequately cover both drug costs and dispensing fees, forcing them to accept low-rate contracts to retain patients without violating antitrust laws [19].

The lack of transparency and regulation in PBMs poses a critical threat to the financial sustainability

of community pharmacies, prompting calls from the National Community Pharmacists Association for the modernization of pharmacy reimbursement to safeguard patient access to state Medicaid programs [20]. A commissioned cost of dispensing report revealed that pharmacies are currently under-reimbursed, emphasizing the importance of dispensing fees to cover overhead costs essential for their operations. These fees, distinct from care coordination activities classified as PCS, are crucial for ensuring the viability of community pharmacies [21].

In addition to reimbursement challenges, other barriers include the inadequate infrastructure in some pharmacies to accommodate certain PCS, such as the absence of a separate and confidential room for patient consultations. Concerns also arise regarding the lack of resources and technology necessary for delivering efficient services, such as access to electronic health records and proper documentation of patient care activities [22].

Recommendations needed for community pharmacists to effectively provide patient care services:

Enhancing the integration of community pharmacists into interdisciplinary, collaborative teams focused on improving the health of populations and reducing health care costs presents a significant opportunity for enhancing care value. To effectively deliver these services, community pharmacists must possess a diverse skill set and adhere to specific recommendations.

Firstly, continuous education and training are crucial for pharmacists to remain abreast of the latest advancements in pharmaceutical care and treatment protocols. This involves participating in workshops, seminars, and conferences to augment their knowledge and skills [23]. Additionally, pharmacists should develop robust communication skills to engage effectively with patients, comprehend their needs, and provide clear instructions on medication use and management.

Moreover, establishing strong relationships with patients is fundamental to ensuring positive patient care outcomes. Pharmacists should allocate time to listen to patients' concerns, address their queries, and offer tailored advice based on individual health requirements. By fostering trust and rapport with patients, pharmacists can promote medication adherence and improve health outcomes [24].

Furthermore, collaboration with other healthcare providers, such as physicians and nurses, is

essential to guarantee comprehensive and coordinated care for patients. This interdisciplinary approach facilitates the exchange of information and resources, ultimately enhancing patient outcomes and satisfaction. Alongside clinical duties, pharmacists must prioritize patient safety and confidentiality.

Accurate dispensing of medications, thorough medication reviews, and monitoring for potential drug interactions or adverse effects are critical responsibilities [25]. Maintaining precise patient records and upholding stringent confidentiality standards safeguard patient privacy and ensure the security of their health information. Pharmacists should also stay abreast of regulatory guidelines and best practices in pharmacy management to maintain professional standards and comply with legal requirements.

Additionally, embracing technology and innovation is vital for modern pharmacists to elevate the quality and efficiency of patient care services. Implementation of electronic health records, medication management systems, and telehealth platforms can streamline communication, enhance medication adherence, and facilitate remote consultations with patients. Leveraging data analytics and evidence-based practice enables pharmacists to make informed decisions and optimize patient outcomes. By integrating digital tools and technology, pharmacists can enhance their practice and deliver more personalized and effective care to patients [26].

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the role of community pharmacists in patient care services is essential and multifaceted. They serve as valuable resources for patients seeking personalized and comprehensive healthcare solutions. However, there are significant barriers and challenges, including reimbursement issues, lack of resources, and layout constraints. To effectively provide patient care services, community pharmacists need continuous education, strong communication skills, interdisciplinary collaboration, a focus on patient safety and confidentiality, adherence to regulatory guidelines, and the embrace of technology and innovation. Overcoming these challenges and implementing the recommended strategies will further elevate the critical role of community pharmacists in advancing patient care and promoting better health outcomes for individuals and communities.

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