

Value-Based Healthcare: Improving Outcomes While Reducing Costs

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In today's fast-paced world, when individuals experience health concerns or require expert guidance, the first stop is often not a hospital or a specialist clinic, but the local community pharmacy. These pharmacies have evolved far beyond their traditional role of dispensing medications. Today, they serve as accessible healthcare hubs, offering a range of services that include patient counseling, vaccinations, chronic disease management, health education, and pharmacotherapy follow-ups. In many ways, community pharmacies act as the first line of defense in maintaining public health, especially during widespread health crises or epidemics [1]. The approachable nature of pharmacists enhances public access to reliable information, early identification of potential health risks, and timely referrals to higher levels of care when necessary.

Despite this potential, the contribution of community pharmacies to public health is still underappreciated. To fully realize their role, pharmacists must actively embrace public health responsibilities, integrating preventive care and health promotion into their daily practices. Simultaneously, the general population needs to recognize pharmacists not merely as dispensers of medications but as healthcare professionals capable of advising on a broad spectrum of health-related matters [2].

REDEFINING SELF-CARE BEYOND OVER-THE-COUNTER PRODUCTS

Self-care is often narrowly interpreted as the use of over-the-counter (OTC) products, but its scope is far more comprehensive. According to the International Self-Care Foundation, self-care encompasses seven key pillars: health literacy and knowledge, mental well-being, self-awareness and personal agency, physical activity, healthy nutrition, risk avoidance or mitigation, good hygiene practices, and prudent use of health services. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines self-care as the ability of individuals, families, and communities to maintain health, prevent disease, and manage illness with or without professional assistance. Community pharmacists are uniquely positioned to support these pillars, guiding patients in making informed decisions about medications, lifestyle adjustments, and preventive measures [3,4].

Pharmacists play a critical role in promoting safe and responsible

use of medications, including OTC drugs. They help patients navigate the risks and benefits of treatments, identify potential drug interactions, and optimize outcomes. This function becomes especially significant in managing minor health conditions, where timely and informed interventions can prevent complications and reduce unnecessary visits to hospitals. With 93% of Americans living within five miles of a community pharmacy, pharmacists are among the most accessible healthcare professionals, offering guidance more frequently than patients receive from their primary care physicians.

EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF PHARMACY PRACTICE

The role of pharmacists has expanded dramatically over the past decade. In many regions, pharmacists with provider status can now bill for clinical services, beyond merely dispensing prescriptions. Their responsibilities may include prescribing hormonal contraceptives, managing HIV pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis, participating in test-to-treat programs for infections, and providing chronic disease management under collaborative practice agreements. These expanded roles enable pharmacists to address a wide range of healthcare needs directly, positioning

community pharmacies as essential hubs for both acute and preventive care [5].

Moreover, community pharmacists are increasingly involved in public health initiatives. These can include administering vaccines, conducting health screenings, offering smoking cessation programs, and providing nutritional counseling. The accessibility and trust associated with pharmacists allow them to influence patient behavior effectively, helping individuals adopt healthier lifestyles, adhere to treatment plans, and engage in preventive health measures.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN INTEGRATING PUBLIC HEALTH

While pharmacists are well-positioned to contribute to public health, challenges persist. Many pharmacists still view traditional roles, such as dispensing medications and ensuring compliance with prescriptions, as their primary responsibilities. Public health functions, such as vaccination campaigns or health education initiatives, may be seen as secondary or less impactful. Additionally, pharmacists may feel less confident in providing services outside their traditional scope, particularly programs aimed at sensitive or complex health issues, including substance abuse interventions [6].

Overcoming these challenges requires structural support, professional training, and societal recognition. Pharmacies must be integrated into broader healthcare strategies, with incentives for pharmacists to engage in public health activities. Patients, in turn, need to understand the value of consulting pharmacists not only for medications but also for advice on lifestyle, preventive care, and self-management of minor health issues.

THE FUTURE OF SELF-CARE AND COMMUNITY PHARMACY

The potential for community pharmacies to shape the future of self-care is immense. By combining accessibility, professional expertise, and trust, pharmacists can empower individuals to take greater responsibility for their health [7]. This empowerment can manifest in numerous ways, from guiding medication use and providing disease prevention education to offering mental health support and promoting healthy lifestyle choices.

The integration of community pharmacies into public health frameworks can also relieve pressure on primary care systems and hospitals. By addressing minor health concerns early, supporting preventive care, and guiding responsible self-care, pharmacists help reduce unnecessary medical visits, lower healthcare costs, and improve overall health outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Community pharmacies are no longer just venues for filling

prescriptions—they are becoming central hubs of self-care, wellness, and public health. To maximize their potential, pharmacists must embrace expanded roles, engage in preventive care, and foster strong connections with the communities they serve. Simultaneously, society must recognize the expertise and accessibility of pharmacists, viewing them as critical partners in promoting health and well-being. As self-care continues to grow in importance, the neighborhood pharmacy stands ready to play a transformative role in supporting healthier communities.

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