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How COVID Impacted The Role of Pharmacists

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Pharmacists are often the most visible and accessible members of a patient’s healthcare team. In fact, 90% of Americans live within five miles of a community pharmacy. This status has led to an expansion of the role of pharmacist during the COVID-19 outbreak, with pharmacies as a prime example of the sort of critical business that has been permitted to stay open during the pandemic. This makes pharmacists a first resort, not a last resort, for health care counseling and medication concerns.

“During the COVID outbreak there were a number of calls I received as a pharmacist requesting counseling since a lot of patients were unable to reach their providers. Questions ranged from what to look out for, how to prevent, symptomatic relief, and even overall assurance regarding the pandemic. Working for Medly allows our pharmacists to offer contactless deliveries, telephone and video counseling, which allowed the transition from precovid to covid care much easier,” said Stella Musa, PharmD, CDCES, Director of Clinical Relations at Medly Pharmacy.

One way in which the role of pharmacist has expanded is in the use of pharmacists to triage patients, reducing the burden on overextended care systems. “Triage is an important way to make sure those patients who need health care are receiving it while those who are safe to stay home aren’t occupying slots in hospitals and clinic waiting rooms,” wrote Shivangi Patel, PharmD Candidate and Jonathan Ogurchak, PharmD, CSP in [The Pharmacy Times](#).

Pharmacists are also well-situated to know whether or not patients should be referred to continuing care or whether over-the-counter care will suffice. “As an integral part of the health care system, pharmacists are trained to provide valuable knowledge to patients regarding disease states, and COVID-19 is no different.,” wrote Patel and Ogurchak.

One way in which pharmacists could contribute to helping lessen the load of the pandemic on healthcare providers would be through federal laws streamlining the current patchwork of state laws that control who tests for what and when. “We urge policymakers to include or authorize pharmacists in testing, interpreting, counseling patients on test results, initiating treatment, and counseling patients when treatments are available, and ensuring the appropriate legal and regulatory authorities support pharmacists call to action to provide this essential patient care,” stated the [Pharmacy Organization’s Joint Policy Recommendations to Combat the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

Another way in which pharmacists are well-positioned to contribute involves administration of any future COVID-19 vaccine. “Given the clear accessibility and success to date of pharmacists administering all types of vaccines to vulnerable and underserved populations, serving as knowledgeable and accessible immunization providers within their communities, as well as their collaboration with public health and other providers, a successful vaccination distribution plan for the equitable allocation of COVID-19 vaccine(s) must involve all licensed pharmacists and pharmacies,” stated the [Joint Pharmacy Comments on the Discussion Draft of the Preliminary Framework for Equitable Allocation of COVID-19 Vaccine](#).

Ultimately with the status of pharmacists as the most accessible health care providers, the expansion of their role during and after the pandemic would appear to be almost a given. However, in order for this to happen, several stars must align, from the streamlining of state laws into a standardized and equitable set of guidelines to the cooperation and support of other healthcare professionals. By maintaining a focus on patient outcomes and patient experience during this time to reinvent processes and rethink conventional wisdom, healthcare professionals from every sphere of the medical career can ensure patients with or without COVID-19 are properly cared for and supported.

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