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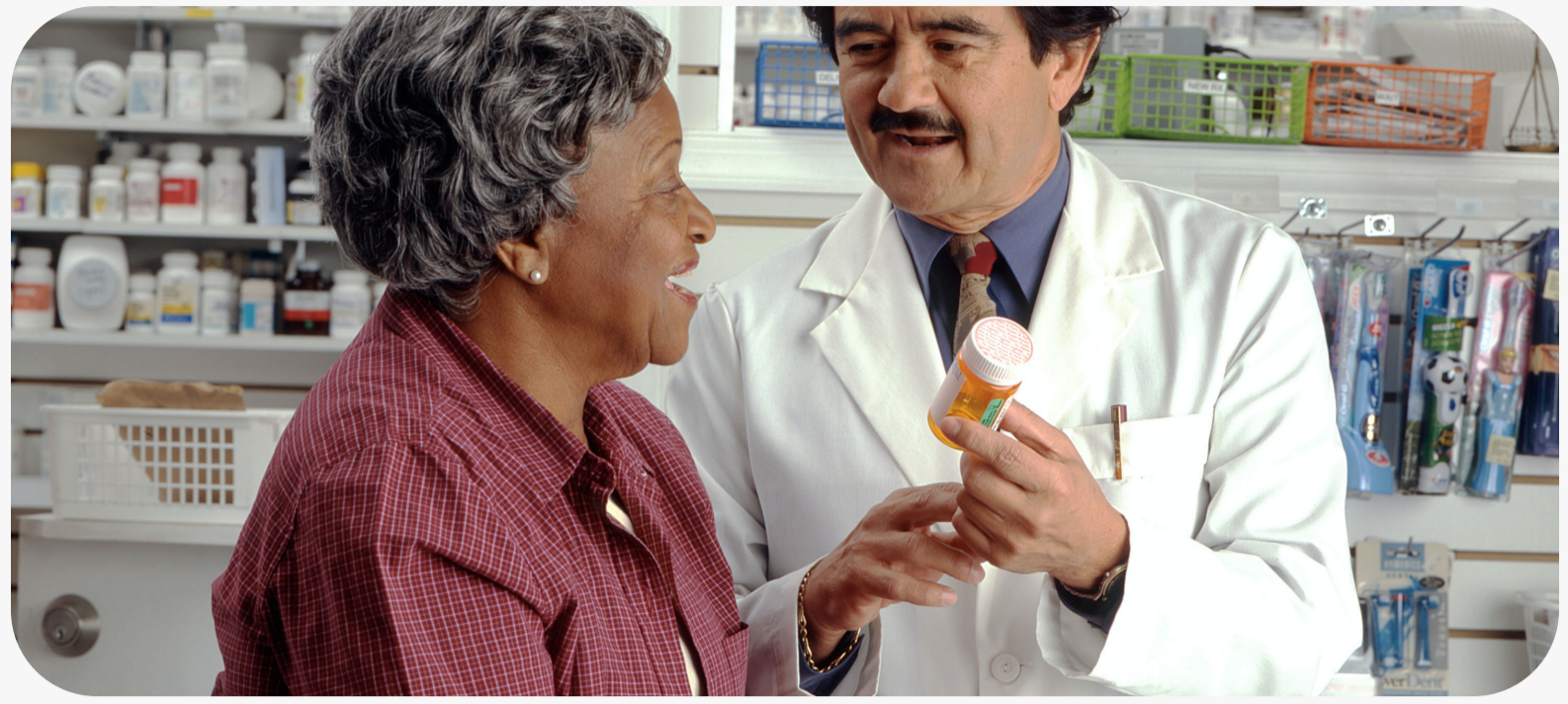


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The Changing Role of Pharmacy: Pharmacists as an Extension of Care

ND Medina



When considering the important and impactful members of a patient’s healthcare team, much more attention is likely to be paid to the specialists, primary care team and nurses. However, pharmacists are a consistent factor throughout the circle of care, and their important support role is often overlooked.

Despite pharmacists’ extensive training on basic healthcare services, such as blood pressure screenings, providing education on the use of glucometers in patients with diabetes, and providing an interpretation of readings and diagnostic tools, many patients remain unaware that pharmacists are primed to help them in this regard. Patients are also unaware that pharmacists can serve as a resource for over-the-counter remedies for common complaints, saving them both the cost and time of getting to a doctor’s office.

However, that has been changing, Especially since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, “nearly one in three people are more likely to visit a pharmacy for advice before seeking help elsewhere than they were before the COVID-19 pandemic, a survey has found. The **survey of 2,035 people**, carried out by PureProfile on behalf of PAGB — a representative body for manufacturers of branded over-the-counter medicines — looked at changing attitudes to self-care and NHS use in light of the pandemic,” according to **the Pharmaceutical Journal**.

Additionally, almost one in three people (31%) who would not have visited a pharmacy for advice before seeking help elsewhere said they were more likely to do so following the pandemic.

According to GP Dr. Sarah Jarvis, “The survey also reveals a greater willingness to practise self care and to seek advice from a pharmacist as a first port of call... Of course we must make sure that individuals seek expert medical advice when they need to – increasing awareness of the expertise of pharmacists in identifying potentially serious symptoms will help with that.”

Deborah Evans, a pharmacist in Winchester and Fellow of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, said, “Pharmacies have played a central role in helping people to care for themselves during the coronavirus pandemic... PAGB’s survey results suggest there is real scope to build on changes in the way people have accessed healthcare services in the last three months, making more effective use of the expertise of pharmacists and their teams.”

Pharmacists help to reach people where they are in their communities. “One reason that an experiment to reduce high blood pressure in a high-risk population succeeded is that it adapted its approach to encourage trust,” said Aaron Carroll in his New York Times article **“What Barbershops Can Teach About Delivering Health Care”**.

This study “suggests that health care need not take place in a doctor’s office — or be provided by a physician — to be effective.” In fact, pharmacists can adapt their interventions to overcome barriers that might otherwise seem intractable. In the study cited in this article, pharmacists stepped in to measure blood pressure and bring measuring tests to the barbershops. This collaboration between the community and pharmacists resulted in an “improvement in blood pressure... more than **three times** that of the average of previous pharmacist-based interventions seeking to improve blood pressure,” according to the article.

In fact, in many states pharmacists can become **certified** to provide vaccinations and long-acting antipsychotics without an appointment and trip to the doctor’s office. “In 2012, the number of vaccines administered by pharmacists was expanded from just the flu shot, to include a total of 10 adult vaccines for prevention of illnesses such as shingles, hepatitis A and B, meningitis, and more,” stated **an article** in Commonwealth Medicine. These vaccines are often available via insurance without the copay or cost of an office visit.

In addition, in states across the country pharmacists can recommend and prescribe routine medications such as those to quit smoking and oral contraceptives. They are also authorized to interpret common diagnostic tools, such as for influenza and strep throat. This trend continues to increase in many other states as the need for accessible and affordable healthcare continues to grow. Pharmacists as an untapped resource of provider-level health care continue to be recognized.

“Seemingly intractable problems can be overcome by expanding the focus of our interventions. There are many more professionals involved in health care besides physicians. They can help make health care better,” said Carroll in his New York Times piece, **“The Unsung Role of the Pharmacist in Patient Health”**.

With pharmacists participating more positively and aggressively as members of health care teams, patients experience a higher level of basic care without the expense and difficulty of making it to a doctor’s office.

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