

PHARMACY PRINCIPLES FOR HEALTH CARE REFORM

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Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy, American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American College of Clinical Pharmacy, American Pharmacists Association,
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PHARMACISTS IMPROVE PATIENT CARE

Policymakers are discussing options to strengthen the nation's health care system, improve quality and safety, provide coverage and benefits for millions of uninsured and underinsured Americans, and respond to the challenge of meeting the health care needs of the American population, especially an aging America. Our nation's pharmacists play a critical role in providing affordable, accessible and quality health care. Decisions made to reform our health care system should enhance, fully recognize and utilize the professional skills and competencies of pharmacists.

Proper use of prescription medications helps improve quality of life and health outcomes. However, the health care system incurs more than \$177 billion annually in mostly avoidable health care costs to treat adverse events from inappropriate medication use. The proper use of medication becomes even more important as treatment of chronic disease costs the health care system \$1.3 trillion annually, or about 75 cents of every health care dollar.

Pharmacists have extensive clinical knowledge and expertise in the use of medications, and are one of the most accessible of all health care professionals. This makes them uniquely positioned in the health care system to help patients optimize appropriate medication use, reduce medication related problems and improve health outcomes through the delivery of pharmacist-provided patient care services, including medication therapy management (MTM), health promotion and education, and disease prevention and mitigation. The approximately 227,000 pharmacists in the United States practice in sites including pharmacies; hospitals; long-term care facilities; medical clinics and home health agencies; academic health centers; managed care organizations; and other health care settings where medications are used.

As the Institute of Medicine¹ has noted,

"...because of the immense variety and complexity of medications now available...the pharmacist has become an essential resource...and thus access to his or her expertise must be possible at all times."

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The IOM report, *Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century*, identifies six aims for health care system improvement: safety, effectiveness, patient-centeredness, timeliness, efficiency, and equity. With these objectives in mind, we have developed three broad goals related to medication access and

¹ Institutes of Medicine. *To Err Is Human: Building a Safer Health System*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press; 2000.

use that should be an integral part of the health reform discussion:

- Recognizing the role of pharmacists to help ensure that medication therapy is safe, effective, equitable, patient-centered, and results in quality outcomes;
- Ensuring that all Americans have timely access to prescription medications that are provided accurately and efficiently;
- Expanding the use of health information technology to support full integration of pharmacists as part of the health care delivery team.
- We ask that policymakers consider the positions of our nation's pharmacists and pharmacies in three key areas. These recommendations are critical to helping patients make the most effective and safe use of their prescription medications and to maintaining a critical pharmacy delivery infrastructure.

Reform Principle I Improve Quality & Safety of Medication Use

Pharmacists help achieve the best possible medical outcomes from the use of prescription medications through various types of medication-related services. These services include working collaboratively with physicians and other healthcare providers in recommending specific medications or changes in medications. Pharmacists also provide services to patients that help them better understand their medications and how to take them. Pharmacist services help prevent drug interactions and adverse effects.

Pharmacists also support public health prevention and education strategies. These include counseling patients on prevention and wellness issues, such as weight management and smoking cessation, as well as providing immunizations. In every state except one, pharmacists are authorized to provide one or more types of immunizations — influenza, pneumonia, and bio-defense-related vaccines — which are critical to promoting and protecting public health.

Health Care Reform Principles – Quality & Safety

- **Principle I (A):** Incorporate coverage for pharmacist-provided patient care services into public and private health care programs. These programs could include medication therapy reviews for those patients entering Medicare and for other patients with documented medical need, medication therapy management (MTM) services, as well as pharmacist-delivered immunizations.
- **Principle I (B):** Provide appropriate payment for pharmacist-provided patient care services. These payments could be based on pay-for-performance programs connected to specific evidence-based measures.

Reform Principle II Assure Patient Access to Needed Medications & Pharmacy Services

A viable and accessible medication-delivery infrastructure is critical to patients' health. Patients should have ready access to both needed medications and services through a network of pharmacies and pharmacists. This is especially important given the burden of chronic illness, and impending retirement of approximately 80 million "baby boomers" who take more prescription medications on average than younger individuals.

Health Care Reform Principles – Infrastructure

- **Principle II (A):** Assure that all Americans have access to the services of well-educated and trained pharmacists competent to meet specific health care needs of patients by establishing and financing a comprehensive federal health professions workforce strategy.
- **Principle II (B):** Within the context of their prescription plan coverage, allow patients to choose the provider of both prescription medications, as well as MTM and other pharmacist-provided patient care services.
- **Principle II (C):** Provide appropriate reimbursement to pharmacists and pharmacies for the costs associated with obtaining medications, and payment for dispensing and administration services in order to assure accurate delivery to patients. Payment for dispensing should reflect the costs to dispense.
- **Principle II (D):** Ensure pharmacists can provide patients access to the most appropriate, cost-effective medications, including generic medications and biologicals, without any artificial impediments or barriers to generic substitution.

Reform Principle III Promote Pharmacy & Health Information Technology Interoperability

Health information technology is rapidly becoming an integral part of health care delivery in the United States. The use of electronic health records and electronic prescribing has increased dramatically in recent years, and the exchange of information among providers has significantly improved the delivery and quality of health care. Pharmacists should be able to interface in an electronic, interoperable health care system to provide the best possible quality of care to patients. The information obtained through interoperability will help pharmacists ensure patient adherence to their medication regimens, reduce medication related errors, and enhance medical decision making.

Health Care Reform Principles – Health IT

- **Principle III (A):** Provide pharmacists electronic access to critical patient health care information, including diagnosis and laboratory values. This information must be provided through an interoperable electronic health record system, including electronic prescribing, that supports multi-directional communications among various health care providers and settings.
- **Principle III (B):** Establish federal and state grants to health care providers, including pharmacists, that support the continued growth of an interoperable health care system.
- **Principle III (C):** Assure the appropriate flow of critical information within and among health care providers, including pharmacists, that is needed to make decisions regarding the best possible treatment for patients, while protecting patient information.

CONCLUSION

All Americans need access to prescription medications and to pharmacist-provided patient care services to help them optimize therapeutic outcomes and reduce the risk of adverse events from medication therapy. Health care reform provides an opportunity to advance these goals. Pharmacists are a highly trained and valuable resource, yet they are currently underutilized. Health care reform discussions should focus, in part, on strategies to maximize efficiency and safety of drug distribution while providing patients with access to the full benefit of pharmacist-provided patient care services to achieve better health care.