

Patient Access to Pharmacists' Care Coalition (PAPCC)

Pharmacists' Education and Qualifications

Pharmacists Receive Significant Education and Training

Pharmacists today are called on to provide a wide range of services to many different types of patients. Pharmacists are capable of filling this role based on their extensive education and training. When pharmacists are able to fully utilize their education and training, they can make a significant impact improving public health. For example, since the federal government called on pharmacists to assist in vaccinating Americans amid the H1N1 outbreak in 2009, pharmacists have been instrumental in increasing the vaccination rate in the U.S.; today, more than 20% of flu vaccinations are administered in pharmacies. Another example is in the area of health and wellness tests and counseling, where pharmacists are increasingly being paid by private payers to perform these important services, which include blood pressure and diabetes testing. In both of these examples, pharmacists have used their education and training to innovate in order to meet the needs of their patients.

Many pharmacists practicing today have a B.S. in Pharmacy. A five-year bachelor's of science degree in pharmacy that, along with advanced training, enables them to deliver many of the types of services referenced above. Since 2001, pharmacists must earn a Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) degree, a professional degree awarded by our Nation's more than 130 accredited colleges and schools of pharmacy. Pharm.D. programs typically take four years of professional study to complete, following at least two years of pre-professional education, for a total of six years of education. In addition to coursework in biology, chemistry, pharmacology, pharmacotherapy, patient assessment, and medical ethics, students also receive structured experiential education where they gain experience as patient care providers delivering multiple services such as immunizations, medication management, HIV-specialized services, and many others. Pharmacists are the only healthcare practitioners with this much education and training in the area of medication management.

Pharmacist Must Obtain and Maintain Licensure

State boards of pharmacy license pharmacists who have successfully completed their professional education. Pharmacists must pass two exams to get a license. One exam, the North American Pharmacist Licensure Exam (NAPLEX), tests pharmacy skills and knowledge. The Multistate Pharmacy Jurisprudence Exam (MPJE), or a state-specific test, on pharmacy law is also required.ⁱ States require pharmacists to continue their education and training through the course of their career, with many pharmacists earning additional certificates and other qualifications (including residencies) to provide specialized services.

Pharmacists Provide High Quality of Care

According to a report issued by the Public Health Service in 2011, pharmacists involved in the delivery of patient care services with appropriate privileges across many practice settings have been successful in improving patient outcomes. Expanded pharmacists' services improve evidence-based quality metrics resulting in better health outcomes. For instance, pharmacist involvement in care has resulted in significant reductions of hemoglobin A1C levels in diabetic patients, significantly reduced systolic blood pressure in hypertension patients, and a reduced rate of inpatient admissions among heart failure patients.ⁱⁱ

Background

Millions of Americans lack adequate access to primary health care and this is only expected to get worse as demand increases. Over the next two decades, the number of Medicare enrollees is expected to grow from roughly 50 million to over 80 million.ⁱⁱⁱ In addition, approximately 45% of Americans have at least one chronic condition, and 27% have multiple chronic conditions, rates that are expected to continue to rise.^{iv v} Further, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that an additional 25 million individuals will potentially be gaining health coverage under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA). Factoring all of this in, the Association of American Medical Colleges projects that, by 2020, there will be more than 91,000 fewer doctors than needed to meet demand, and the impact will be most severe on underserved populations.

In the face of this anticipated shortage, pharmacists are conveniently accessible health care professionals who, in coordination and collaboration with other health care team providers, are capable of playing a greater role in the delivery of health care services. While pharmacists remain committed to assisting patients with access and information related to their prescription medications, pharmacists today are providing a broad spectrum of services, within their scope of practice, including conducting health and wellness testing, managing chronic diseases and performing medication management, administering immunizations, and working in and partnering with hospitals and health systems to advance health and wellness and helping to reduce hospital readmissions.

Access to Pharmacists' Care

Physicians and certain non-physician health care professionals are reimbursed under Medicare Part B for providing necessary health care services. With very limited exceptions, pharmacists' services are not reimbursed in this fashion. The lack of reimbursement of pharmacists for services provided within their state scope of practice unnecessarily limits patient access to certain health care services and the contributions pharmacists can make to their health care and outcomes. Enabling pharmacists to practice at the top of their education and training, and be better integrated into the patient's health care team, will improve health outcomes and greatly benefit specific populations, especially those with chronic disease such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

About Us

The Patient Access to Pharmacists' Care Coalition's mission is to develop and help enact a federal policy proposal that would enable Medicare beneficiary access to, and payment for,

Medicare Part B services by state-licensed pharmacists in medically underserved communities. Our primary goal is to improve medically underserved seniors' access to pharmacists' services consistent with state scope of practice laws and regulations.

Contact

Please contact Kristina Lunner at Kristina.Lunner@LeavittPartners.com or (202) 774-1403 for more information.

ⁱ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Pharmacists," Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012–13 edition, <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/Healthcare/Pharmacists.htm> - See more at: <http://dpeaflcio.org/programs->

ⁱⁱ U.S. Public Health Service, "Improving Patient and Health System Outcomes through Advanced Pharmacy Practice: A Report to the U.S. Surgeon General 2011," Office of the Chief Pharmacist,

<http://www.usphs.gov/corpslinks/pharmacy/documents/2011AdvancedPharmacyPracticeReporttotheUSSG.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Congressional Research Service. Medicare Financing (R41436; September 19, 2013), by Patricia A. Davis

^{iv} Wu S, Green A. Projection of Chronic Illness Prevalence and Cost Inflation. RAND Corporation, October 2000.

^v Anderson G. Chronic care: making the case for ongoing care. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: Prince-ton (NJ); 2010. [cited 2011 Jan 19].