



Pharmacists: The Medication-Use Experts

Pharmacists are medication-use experts who play a critical role in patient safety. As the number and variety of available medications grows each year, pharmacists are more important to a patient's overall healthcare than ever before.

- Every week, four out of every five U.S. adults will use prescription medicines, over-the-counter drugs, or dietary or herbal supplements. In the same time-period, nearly one-third of adults will take five or more different medications.
- Each year, 44,000 - 98,000 Americans die as a result of medical errors.¹ Preventable "medication errors" (errors occurring in the medication-use process) are among the most common medical mistakes, incurring at least \$3.5 billion per year in extra hospital costs alone.²

Pharmacists keep their patients healthy and safe by informing them, and their prescribers, of possible adverse effects or drug interactions, as well as how to avoid unnecessary costs from complications or hospitalizations.

Pharmacists are trusted healthcare professionals and patients value access to these well-trained healthcare professionals.

- Pharmacists complete a minimum of 2 years of pre-pharmacy coursework before entering the 4 year professional program. Over 50% of students entering a professional pharmacy program have already attained a baccalaureate degree.
- Pharmacists are required to pass national and state-based examinations to receive their licenses to practice.
- Pharmacists participate in continuing professional development throughout their careers through continuing education and other programs.

Pharmacists Enhance Patient Safety

In July 2006, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) issued its report *Preventing Medication Errors*, highlighting ways in which pharmacists' expertise and participation on the healthcare team can help prevent errors, including:

- Utilizing pharmacists as integral members of the patient care team as experts in medication-use safety and quality;
- Encouraging patients to keep an up-to-date list of all their medications;
- Consulting with patients about their medications at key points, including during clinical decision making and at hospital discharge;
- Developing reliable drug information for health professionals and consumers;
- Encouraging the use of standardized electronic technologies for prescribing and record keeping;
- Managing continuity in medication use across care settings;
- Recommending prescribing decisions based on scientific evidence; and

To successfully address the above recommendations, resources (compensation, human resources, etc.) must be provided.

¹ The National Academies Press: To Err Is Human: Building a Safer Health System (2000) Available from http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=9728&page=1. Accessed January 17, 2007.

² The National Academies Press: Preventing Medication Errors: Quality Chasm Series (2007). Available from http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=11623&page=R1. Accessed January 17, 2007



The Alliance for Pharmaceutical Care is a consortium of nine national organizations working together to educate the public, policy makers and other key decision makers about the important role that pharmacists play in the ever-evolving healthcare system.

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