

Rx Basics: *What Pharmacists Do*



Pharmacists help patients in a variety of ways: they dispense medications; provide information and advice on health issues, medicines and related treatments; and refer patients to physicians and other health-care providers. Millions of Americans depend on their pharmacists to give them important information about the medications they need and how to use them safely and effectively.

Pharmacists are among the most visible, accessible and trusted health-care professionals. Every day, millions of Americans walk into drug stores and depend on pharmacists for assistance and advice for their health-care needs. Year after year, pharmacists are ranked near the top of the list of the nation's most trusted and respected professionals.

More than half of pharmacists (62%) work in retail community pharmacies. Most are salaried employees of chain or grocery-store pharmacies, but some own their own pharmacy. Almost 25% work in hospitals. The rest work for clinics, nursing homes, physicians, mail order and Internet pharmacies, drug manufacturers, pharmaceutical wholesalers, universities or the federal government.

Pharmacists are Dedicated to Patient Health

The main focus of pharmaceutical care is the effective use of medications and disease management regimens to improve patients' health and quality of life.

Pharmacists do much more than dispense prescription drugs to patients. They provide information and counseling about both prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs. They monitor their patients' health and progress to make sure that prescribed and OTC medications work effectively and safely. Specially trained pharmacists administer vaccinations to adults and children in Texas. Pharmacist specialists help patients manage chronic diseases and conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, hypertension, obesity and smoking. Some pharmacists specialize in geriatric care, psychiatric disorders, intravenous nutrition support, oncology, nuclear pharmacy or pharmacotherapy.

All pharmacists are experts in the science and clinical use of medications. They understand the composition, manufacture and uses of thousands of drugs, as well as how those products are tested for purity and strength. A pharmacist must understand the essential activity of a drug and how it works in the body. More and more prescribers rely on pharmacists for information about various drugs, their availability and their activity in the body.

Daily Responsibilities

On a daily basis, many pharmacists dispense medications to patients in accordance with doctor's orders and consult patients on medication usage and contraindications. Pharmacists work with physicians to correctly deliver medications and to report observations and recommendations. Many pharmacists consult patients on OTC medications and on home health-care supplies and various other health-care products. Many pharmacies administer flu, pneumonia and other vaccinations or provide such specialized services such as compounding or medication therapy management (MTM).

Retail pharmacists typically answer a lot of phone calls from patients and other health-care providers, resolve insurance billing/payment issues and maintain government-required records.

Education and Training

To practice pharmacy in the United States, a person must be licensed in the state in which he or she lives. To obtain a license, a candidate must serve an internship under a licensed pharmacist, graduate

from an accredited college of pharmacy and pass a state examination. All states except California grant a license without extensive re-examination to pharmacists already licensed by another state. Most states – including Texas – require continuing education to maintain licensure.

First-time pharmacists must possess a Pharmacy Doctorate degree (Pharm.D.) from an accredited pharmacy school. The specialized four-year graduate degree typically follows 2-3 years of undergraduate study in calculus, chemistry, biology, physics, statistics, ethics and other foundation subjects. Once in pharmacy school, students take degree-specific classes such as pharmacology, virology, clinical toxicology, medicinal chemistry, disease state management, pharmacy law and practice management. In their final year, students participate in advanced experiential rotations in a variety of clinical settings including inpatient medicine, ambulatory care, community pharmacy and institutional pharmacy.

All colleges of pharmacy offer courses in pharmacy practice, designed to teach students to dispense prescriptions, communicate with patients and other health professionals, and to strengthen their understanding of professional ethics and practice management responsibilities. Training increasingly emphasizes direct patient care and consultative services to other health professionals.

After they graduate, some pharmacists enter advanced study programs called residencies, which typically last 1-2 years. A first-year residency generally focuses on pharmacy practice, while second-year residents develop advanced skills and knowledge in specialty areas.

Regulation

The [Texas State Board of Pharmacy](#) is responsible for the licensure, regulation and discipline of Texas pharmacists. Patients or health professionals who believe that a pharmacy or pharmacist has violated state laws or regulations may file a complaint with the Pharmacy Board. The Board does not have jurisdiction over complaints involving rudeness, customer service, and/or pricing/billing disputes.