



Review Article

Pharmacists' involvement in and attitudes toward pharmacy practice research: A systematic review of the literature

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Abstract

Background: The role of pharmacists in health care has evolved toward patient-centered care. Pharmacy practice-based research is essential to the advancement of practice; however, literature addressing attitudes and involvement of pharmacists in practice research indicates reluctance among them. An account of studies undertaken thus far is warranted.

Objective: This systematic review aims to summarize and evaluate the views and attitudes of pharmacists regarding their involvement in pharmacy practice research as well as the barriers and enablers to such research.

Methods: A systematic review of original studies published mainly in MEDLINE, PubMed, EBSCO, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, and Google Scholar was conducted to identify published studies that report pharmacists' attitudes and involvement in research as well as perceived facilitators and barriers. Data were independently extracted by two reviewers using a standardized data abstraction tool.

Results: Fifteen studies utilizing questionnaire-based surveys, focus groups or interviews were identified and included in the review. The majority of studies (10 of 15) involved community pharmacists, while only 6 involved hospital pharmacists. Studies were mostly conducted in the UK (5 of 15), followed by Australia and Canada (3 of 15 each). Early studies focused on pharmacists' attitudes on practice-based research, but most recently there was attention on practice-based research networks (PBRNs). Pharmacists' awareness, interest and willingness to participate in practice research, their actual involvement in research projects, and positive attitude toward research have increased over time. Pharmacists generally believed that practice-based research was needed for professional development of pharmacy and agreed with the importance of research to support evidence-based practice and to improve the quality of patient care and outcomes. The most commonly reported barriers to participation in research across the reviewed studies were: lack of time and workload; insufficient or lack of funds; and lack of research knowledge, training, mentorship and support.

Conclusions: Pharmacists recognize the value of research in advancing pharmacy practice and indicate their willingness to be involved in independent research and in PBRNs. Lack of time, training and support were

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identified as the greatest limitations to participation in practice research. These findings have important implications on promoting research capacity building through the development of PBRNs involving academic and pharmacy practitioners as well as informal research training programs.

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Introduction

Pharmacy has undergone tremendous changes, and the scope of professional practice has expanded in the past few decades.^{1–3} Pharmacists have extended their roles beyond the traditional services of drug products preparation and distribution to ensuring that optimal therapeutic outcomes are achieved through patient-centered cognitive services.^{3,4} These cognitive functions include but are not limited to: patient education and counseling, health promotion and disease prevention, disease state management, and clinical recommendations to other members of the health care team in specialized patient settings. This paradigm shift in pharmacy practice has resulted from several factors such as increased prevalence of drug-related morbidity and mortality,⁵ escalating costs of health care delivery due to demographic changes in the population and technological advancements,² and increased patients' demands, preferences and expectations. The changing roles for pharmacy are also attributed to the ease with which the public access pharmacy services^{2,6} as well as changes in pharmacy curricula that led to increased expertise in therapeutics. The new roles for pharmacists evolve in parallel with evidence-based medicine, another revolution in health services delivery.⁷ As new professional services and practices evolve, there is a need to demonstrate evidence of their benefit and cost-effectiveness.^{2,6,8–11} Some US-based studies have reviewed the literature on the evidence of the benefit of clinical pharmacy services.^{12–15}

Often what is needed is local evidence that demonstrates the need for a new service or different method of service delivery.^{2,9,10,16,17} Such evidence is provided through pharmacy practice research that can inform policy and confirm the value or feasibility of the potential new roles and services.^{2,8,9,11,18} Pharmacy practice-based research focuses on inquiry that takes place within practice settings to address societal-relevant problems.^{2,18} This provides avenue for translating science into practice as well as communicating practice needs

to guide scientific inquiry. This places pharmacy practice research as a driver for establishing new pharmacy services by justifying the need, effectiveness, and the value of these services.^{2,9,18} Therefore, pharmacy practice research is essential to the advancement of pharmacy profession and provides the evidence of benefit of new and existing services.^{2,9–11,18}

However, there is no globally accepted definition of the seemingly straightforward term “pharmacy practice research.” For instance, the Canadian Pharmacists Association defines pharmacy practice research as a component of health services research that focuses on the assessment and evaluation of pharmacy practice.^{19,20} Although obviously unique to pharmacy profession, one limitation of this definition is that not all research in which pharmacists are involved reflects their practice.²⁰ Further, pharmacists may be involved in other related researches that improve quality of care or services delivery. Therefore, pharmacy practice research may also encompass comparative effectiveness research as well as quality of care measurement.²¹ In particular, a newly proposed framework for translational research to transform the US's health care system has described translational research into three major domains (T1, T2, and T3).²¹ Apparently, pharmacy practice research may span all the three broad areas. In the context, of this review, we consider “pharmacy practice research” to be any research activity that pertains pharmacy practice or patient care including, but not limited to, clinical and outcome research, health services research, and comparative effectiveness research.

An evolving initiative in practice-based research environments is the development of practice-based research networks (PBRNs), a form of collaborative learning organizations. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) defines a primary care PBRN as a group of ambulatory practices devoted principally to the primary care of patients, and affiliated in their mission to investigate questions related to community-based practice and to improve the quality of primary care.²² These

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