



## Research Briefs

# Pharmacists' perspectives on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

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## Abstract

*Background:* Passed in 2010, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) resulted in significant changes to the health care system in the United States (US). Though general population surveys reveal the fractious political debate surrounding the law, insights on pharmacists' perspectives on the PPACA are lacking in the literature.

*Objectives:* The objectives of this study were to determine pharmacists' perspectives on the PPACA and determine whether pharmacists' demographic and practice-related characteristics and political beliefs influence their perspectives on the PPACA.

*Methods:* This study was conducted using a descriptive, cross-sectional design. Study data were collected with a self-administered online questionnaire distributed to 21,769 registered pharmacists in five states.

*Results:* A total of 1127 completed surveys were received (5.6% response rate). Roughly 37% of pharmacists reported that they understood the major provisions of the PPACA although most (89%) respondents agreed that understanding such policies is important for practicing pharmacy. Just over half (50.6%) of respondents did not support the PPACA while 47.7% supported the legislation. Political orientation, age, gender, and race were found to be significantly related to pharmacists' perspectives on the PPACA.

*Conclusion:* Respondent pharmacists' perceptions of the PPACA appear to be related to political orientation and demographic characteristics. Given that pharmacists will be impacted by the implementation of the PPACA and are so accessible to the public, additional information on health care policy and PPACA should be provided to pharmacists.

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*Keywords:* Pharmacists; Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; Health policy

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## Introduction

Signed by President Barack Obama on March 23, 2010, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) brought in the most

comprehensive changes to the American health care system since the creation of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965. Some of the key provisions of the PPACA include the creation of a new

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Patient's Bill of Rights, support for the establishment of Accountable Care Organizations, expansion of Medicaid, private health insurance regulatory changes, establishment of a state and federal health insurance marketplace, income-based subsidies for insurance access, and an individual mandate requiring insurance coverage for all individuals.<sup>1</sup> Though it has been several years since its passage, PPACA remains a focal point of political discord. No other law in recent history has generated such passionate response across the political spectrum. According to an October 2013 Gallup poll of adults in the United States (US), 45% approve of the PPACA, while 50% disapprove of the law.<sup>2</sup> The Gallup poll highlighted variation in attitude toward the law by party affiliation, with 86% of Republicans disapproving the law, and 83% of Democrats approving the law. As several provisions of the law are yet to be implemented, the overall impact of the law on the three essential barometers of health care system, i.e. cost, quality, and access, remains to be seen.

Though surveys covering opinion of the general public on the PPACA appear on a regular basis, limited empirical studies describing the knowledge and opinion of health care professionals on PPACA exist. In one such study of medical students' perspectives on the PPACA, Huntoon et al<sup>3</sup> found that a large majority (~80%) of their participants supported the legislation. However, when asked of their opinion on the potential impact of the PPACA on health care cost, quality, and access, fragmented responses appeared. Roughly 31%, 68%, and 19% of their study participants believed that the PPACA will improve health care quality, increase access, and contain health care costs, respectively. Almost 59% of medical students did not favor the repeal of the PPACA. In a similar study with medical student participants, Winkelman et al<sup>4</sup> found 46.5% supporting the legislation, with 12.5% not supporting the legislation. Less than half (48.8%) of the medical students reported understanding the basic components of the PPACA.

A thorough review of the literature did not reveal any study describing pharmacists' perspectives on the PPACA. Considering the direct and indirect influence of the PPACA on the pharmacy profession,<sup>5</sup> it is essential to determine pharmacists' perspectives on the PPACA. There are several provisions within the act that impact the practice of pharmacy, and thus necessitate

the knowledge of the act among members of the profession. For example, under the PPACA, Medicare 'donut hole' is to be eventually phased out by 2020. The PPACA includes provisions aimed at reducing costs and improving quality of care through integrated and collaborative care models, which embed pharmacists and pharmacy-related services.<sup>5</sup> The PPACA builds on Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 by strengthening the requirement for medication therapy management (MTM) provision by Medicare Part D plans. The purpose of this study was to determine pharmacists' perspectives on the PPACA and determine whether pharmacists' demographic and practice-related characteristics and political beliefs influence their perspectives on the PPACA.

## Methods

### *Study design and sample*

This study was conducted using a descriptive, cross-sectional design. Study data were collected with a self-administered online questionnaire distributed to pharmacists. A total of 21,769 registered pharmacists in a convenience sample of five states including Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Oregon, and Tennessee were targeted for study purposes. The email addresses of registered pharmacists in each of the five states were obtained from the respective pharmacy boards. The online survey was administered using the Qualtrics online survey software system (Qualtrics Inc., Provo, UT). The survey was conducted over a one month period (August 21–September 23, 2013), and included four reminder emails. Survey email included information about the study and a survey link. Further, the email emphasized voluntary participation and response confidentiality. The study was approved under exempt status by the University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board (UM IRB).

### *Study questionnaire*

The questionnaire developed by Huntoon et al<sup>3</sup> to measure medical students' knowledge and attitude toward the PPACA was adapted by the investigators of this study for use in registered pharmacists. In this study, we modified the questionnaire to measure pharmacists' perspectives on the PPACA. The study questionnaire included two sections. Section I included two subsections, with the first sub-section assessing pharmacists'

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