



Commentary

Defining professional pharmacy services in community pharmacy

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Summary

Multiple terms and definitions exist to describe specific aspects of pharmacy practice and service provision, yet none encompass the full range of professional services delivered by community pharmacy. The majority of current pharmacy service definitions and nomenclature refer to either the professional philosophy of pharmaceutical care or to specific professional pharmacy services; particularly pharmaceutical services provided by pharmacists with a focus on drug safety, effectiveness and health outcomes. The objective of this paper is therefore to define a professional pharmacy service within the context of the community pharmacy model of service provision. A *professional pharmacy service* is defined as “an action or set of actions undertaken in or organised by a pharmacy, delivered by a pharmacist or other health practitioner, who applies their specialised health knowledge personally or via an intermediary, with a patient/client, population or other health professional, to optimise the process of care, with the aim to improve health outcomes and the value of healthcare.” Based on Donabedian’s framework, the professional pharmacy service definition incorporates the concepts of organizational structure, process indicators and outcome measures. The definition will assist in many areas including recognition of the full range of services provided by community pharmacy and facilitating the identification of indicators of professional pharmacy service implementation and sustainable provision. A simple conceptual model for incorporating all services provided by community pharmacy is proposed.

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Rationale

Current definitions of pharmacy services do not cover the complete community pharmacy service offering as they focus on defining services arising from the pharmaceutical care concept, or alternatively are restricted to services specifically

delivered by pharmacists (Appendix A). Pharmaceutical care is one of the key terms used to describe pharmacy practice beyond the field of dispensing.^{1–5} The pharmaceutical care philosophy was transformed into a service-based definition, where drug-related services were provided

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by pharmacists “specialised knowledge by pharmacists for the patient or health care professionals for purpose of promoting effective and safe drug therapy.”⁴ Subsequent authors modified the idea and coined the term cognitive pharmaceutical services, which again kept pharmacists at the core, but broadened the outcome to patient health rather than drug therapy alone, for example “professional services provided by pharmacists, who use their skills and knowledge to take an active role in contributing to patient health, through effective interaction with both patients and other health professionals.”⁶ The term cognitive pharmaceutical services (CPS) was further adapted to incorporate aspects lacking in previous definitions such as, health services at a local community or population level and acknowledging the role of other pharmacy staff, “CPS can be seen as a range of healthcare-related activities (some of them including pharmaceutical care) to enhance public health and the quality of drug therapy, promoted by the pharmacy staff.”⁷

Although pharmaceutical care may remain the primary focus for pharmacist driven services, a broader definition is needed to acknowledge the wider role that the community pharmacy network and community pharmacies individually play in healthcare. In many ways, pharmaceutical care definitions have narrowed the role of community pharmacy as they predominantly focus on drug safety, effectiveness and optimizing health outcomes arising from medications. As the role of profession expands and develops, it is important to identify and document the extensive array of services provided by both pharmacists (incorporating specializations and diverse settings), and equally community pharmacies (incorporating other health practitioners and healthcare services).

In recent years, both the role of pharmacists and the professional and business operations of community pharmacy have been changing and expanding. Pharmacists are diversifying the settings in which they practice, and specializations are emerging.⁸ Concurrently, community pharmacies are incorporating professional pharmacy services, into both their professional practice and business model.⁸ Ongoing expansion and differentiation of pharmacists’ role is clearly professionally advantageous. Similarly expansion and differentiation of community pharmacy practices are vital for their survival. This is particularly evident in the current international environment where economic pressure is being exerted on the traditional business model. On an international

basis, an emerging trend is for governments, health insurance companies and/or patients being willing to remunerate for a range of pharmacy services aimed at contributing to improved patient outcomes.⁹

There is no universally accepted definition in the pharmacy practice literature that encompasses the entire scope of activities, services, and programs provided by community pharmacy. A preliminary literature review was conducted using online databases (PubMed, MEDLINE, with no date limits), texts and conference proceedings, along with bibliographic searching, to identify the scope of current pharmacy service definitions. The examination revealed multiple terms and definitions used to describe pharmacist services, as well as aspects of pharmacy practice and service provision, yet none included the full range of services delivered by community pharmacy (Appendix A).

An overarching community pharmacy centric service definition is required as community pharmacies provide an accessible health network delivering a wider range of health services and by a wider range of healthcare providers than generally acknowledged. As community pharmacy transforms to a service provider model a broader definition will assist in researching the types and full impact of service quality, performance and implementation. Finally, a broader definition would facilitate recognition by the community, stakeholders and government of community pharmacy’s role and the value pharmacies provide as a healthcare network. Wider recognition of community pharmacy as a healthcare institution may consequently lead to a greater inclusion in health policy.

Defining a professional pharmacy service

In order to gain an understanding of the full suite of professional pharmacy services that are or may be offered by community pharmacy, the following definition is proposed:

A professional pharmacy service is an action or set of actions undertaken in or organized by a pharmacy, delivered by a pharmacist or other health practitioner, who applies their specialized health knowledge personally or via an intermediary, with a patient/client, population or other health professional, to optimize the process of care, with the aim to improve health outcomes and the value of healthcare.

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