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## COMMENTARY

## Residency pathways to ambulatory care practice: Essential insights for students, residents, and educators

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To provide a guiding document describing residency training opportunities in ambulatory care for students, postgraduate year 1 (PGY1) residents, practicing pharmacists, and pharmacy educators.

**Summary:** Student pharmacists, residents, practitioners, and educators can benefit from a guiding document describing the various pathways to develop as an ambulatory care practitioner through residency training. The benefits and differences of PGY1 and postgraduate year 2 (PGY2) ambulatory care residency programs are included.

**Conclusion:** There are many possible training options for pharmacists interested in pursuing a career in ambulatory care pharmacy practice. In addition to the required ambulatory and community experience required for all Doctorate of Pharmacy students, postgraduate training in an ambulatory environment can allow for specialization. Candidates for residency training can complete a PGY1 pharmacy residency or a PGY1 community-based pharmacy residency, possibly followed by a PGY2 ambulatory care residency. Career paths for ambulatory care pharmacists vary regionally across the country according to competition for positions, local availability of training programs, and the experience of regional leaders. A comprehensive description of these available training pathways and advantages of each are beneficial for students, residents, practicing pharmacists, and educators.

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## Ambulatory care pharmacist practitioner

As defined by the Board of Pharmacy Specialties, ambulatory care pharmacy practice is “the provision of integrated, accessible healthcare services by pharmacists who are accountable for addressing medication needs, developing sustained partnerships with patients, and practicing in the context of family and community.”<sup>1</sup> Ambulatory care

pharmacists may work in community-based practices, clinics, or health systems<sup>1,2</sup> (Table 1).

## Residency training opportunities in ambulatory care

Candidates for residency training have the opportunity to complete a PGY1 pharmacy residency or a PGY1 community-based pharmacy residency, possibly followed by a PGY2 ambulatory care residency. There is a diversity of training models and many possible pathways to a successful career in ambulatory care pharmacy. Pharmacists who mentor student pharmacists and residents should have a comprehensive understanding of these multiple career paths, as options can vary regionally across the United States.

There has been a recent growth trend of accredited PGY2 ambulatory care pharmacy residency programs. In 2010, there were 39 PGY2 ambulatory care pharmacy residency programs,

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**Key Points****Background:**

- Multiple pathways exist for pharmacists to pursue residency training for a career as an ambulatory care pharmacist.

**Findings:**

- This document provides an overview of training options and advantages of each, including PGY1 pharmacy residencies, PGY1 community-based pharmacy residencies, and PGY2 ambulatory care pharmacy residencies.

and this increased to 132 programs in 2017.<sup>3</sup> There also continue to be multiple PGY1 pharmacy residencies that are based entirely or partially in the ambulatory care environment, in addition to 190 PGY1 community-based pharmacy residency programs.<sup>3</sup>

**PGY1 pharmacy residencies**

The ASHP standards for PGY1 Pharmacy Residencies<sup>4</sup> can be achieved in ambulatory or hospital care environments. Most hospital-based residencies will include ambulatory care experiences. Pursuing a hospital-based PGY1 residency will give the resident significant experience with inpatient care, which can be an important foundation for a PGY2 ambulatory care residency. Many hospital-based residencies have significant ambulatory care rotation options that allow residents to experience the continuum of care with inpatient and outpatient rotations. There is also the option to complete a PGY1 pharmacy practice residency in a clinic-based ambulatory care

setting, typically primary care clinics, including large health systems or federally-qualified health centers. Residents will have a concentrated ambulatory experience, with perhaps a larger panel of patients and greater practice autonomy. Residents will be able to become an integral member of the care team in their clinic. These programs may include experience in community pharmacies.

*Patient care*

In any PGY1 pharmacy residency, patient care is a key component of the resident's learning. Pharmacists who are completing a PGY1 residency in the ambulatory care environment can expect to care for patients with significant medical complexities as a key member of the health care team. Residents will mature in their clinical skills during the PGY1 residency to prepare to be an independent clinician. Just as a hospital-based PGY1 residency can include ambulatory care experiences, an ambulatory care-based PGY1 residency can also include some hospital-based experiences.

*Leadership and management*

Leadership and management goals achieved in PGY1 training provide the resident with a broad overview of the operations of the pharmacy department. Activities can include participation in system committees, discussion of administrative topics, working on quality improvement projects, and collaborating with administrators as they perform their daily duties.

When the resident completes residency training, they are prepared to understand general areas of management, such as budgeting; however, they may need further development to carry out this type of task independently.

**Table 1**  
Ambulatory care services

Location	Typical services offered	Potential reimbursement models	Comments
Outpatient clinic (includes patient-centered medical home, federally qualified health centers, physician offices, and health system clinics)	CMM, MTM, CDM, CMR, health and wellness, interprofessional team care, transitions of care, immunization, population health management	Direct MTM billing codes, incident-to billing, value-based, capitated, shared savings payments	Patients may participate through general recruitment or provider referral; patient visits may occur before, during, or after visits with other interprofessional team members
Community pharmacy	CMM, MTM, CDM, CMR, health/wellness, transitions of care, point-of-care testing, medication synchronization, immunization, population health management	Medicare Part D plans, immunization, diabetes education, value-based, and MTM billing codes	Patients may participate through general recruitment or provider referral
Telehealth (includes phone and electronic communication models, and may be based in a clinic or community pharmacy)	CMM, MTM, CDM, CMR, transitions of care, population health management	Value-based; direct billing continues to evolve for telehealth but can include chronic care management and transitional care management	Patients may come from provider referral or identification through population health processes

Abbreviations used: CMM, comprehensive medication management; MTM, medication therapy management; CDM, chronic disease management; CMR: comprehensive medication review.

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