

# Pharmacists' Opioid-Related Services



## The Need

- Communities across the United States have been devastated by increasing prescription and illicit opioid abuse, addiction and overdose.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that opioids (including prescription opioids, heroin, and fentanyl) claimed the lives of 42,000 individuals in 2016.<sup>1</sup>
- According to a 2015 analysis of National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) data, an estimated 25.3 million American adults suffer from chronic pain.<sup>2</sup>

## Pharmacists Can Help

- As the most accessible health care practitioner, and with 89% of Americans living within five miles of a community pharmacy, pharmacists use their medication expertise to better manage pain treatments, including educating patients and families about the safe use of opioids as well as the potential need for and appropriate use of naloxone.
- A systematic review published in the Journal of the American Medical Association indicated that while up to 92% of patients studied reported they had “unused” opioids after surgery, utilizing pharmacists in the assessment of opioid prescribing can help minimize the risk of drug diversion.<sup>3</sup>
- Pharmacists can perform a complete review of a patient’s medication regimen to optimize therapy and minimize side-effects.
  - As part of this service, they may recommend non-opioid pain management alternatives and work with prescribers to address duplicate therapy or overprescribing.
- Every state has passed laws to increase patients’ accessibility to naloxone, including allowing a patient to receive it from a pharmacist without having to see a physician first. These laws greatly improve access to a life-saving medication.<sup>4</sup>
- A study analyzing the economic impact of opioid-related adverse drug events (e.g. nausea, respiratory complications), estimated over half experiencing an event would have a longer hospital stay resulting in 47% higher cost of care for that patient. Involving pharmacists in the process of counseling, discharge, and clinic follow-up of post-operative patients who are prescribed opioids can help reduce opioid-related adverse drug events and subsequent health care costs.<sup>5</sup>
- Pharmacists are involved in pain management programs that include medication tapering services, work in medication assisted treatment programs, and furnish naloxone where authorized. Research has demonstrated the value of pharmacists in positively impacting patients with chronic pain.<sup>6 7</sup>

## The Next Step

- Enacting the *Pharmacy and Medically Underserved Areas Enhancement Act* (H.R. 592/ S. 109) will help prevent opioid abuse and misuse, increase treatment options, and better manage patients’ pain through pharmacist-provided care.
- It is critical that patients and other health care providers can utilize the medication experts on a care team as efforts to enhance prevention, patient education, prescribing, tapering, and treatment of substance use disorder are implemented.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nccih.nih.gov/news/press/08112015>

<sup>3</sup> Bicket MC, Long JJ, Pronovost PJ, Alexander GC, Wu CL. Prescription Opioid Analgesics Commonly Unused After Surgery: A Systematic Review. *JAMA Surg.* 2017;152(11):1066–1071. doi:10.1001/jamasurg.2017.0831

<sup>4</sup> <https://naspa.us/resource/naloxone-access-community-pharmacies/>

<sup>5</sup> E.R. Kessler, M. Shah, S.K. Gruschkus, A. Raju. Cost and quality implications of opioid-based postsurgical pain control using administrative claims data from a large health system: opioid-related adverse events and their impact on clinical and economic outcomes *Pharmacotherapy*, 33 (4) (2013), pp. 383-391

<sup>6</sup> Cox, N., Tak, C.R., Cochella, S.E., Leishman E., & Gunning, K. (2018). Impact of Pharmacist Previsit Input to Providers on Chronic Opioid Prescribing Safety

<sup>7</sup> <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.japh.2017.01.016>