



Pharmacy Partnerships Expand Care

BY ROBERT MONGER, MD



Looking for a way to improve access to healthcare for your patients? The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) says that one cost effective strategy to improve treatment access and quality is for prescribers to form partnerships with pharmacists through collaborative practice agreements that allow pharmacists to expand their participation in patient care. For the past two years I've served on a collaborative practice oversight committee at the Wyoming Board of Pharmacy and during that time I have learned a lot about the rapidly changing landscape of pharmacy training and practice, but many people are not aware of all the clinical services that pharmacists can now provide in collaboration with physicians.

For example, most physicians are familiar with pharmacy led clinics for patients taking chronic anticoagulation medications. Typically, a patient taking warfarin will come to the clinic regularly to have their PT/INR checked, and the pharmacist will use the test result to adjust the warfarin dose and at the same time provide patient education regarding drug interactions, dietary concerns, etc.

In recent years, however, pharmacists have greatly expanded their clinical care skills and now routinely help manage many additional medical conditions including diabetes, hypertension, smoking cessation, thyroid disorders, and hyperlipidemia. A best practices guide* for cardiovascular disease prevention programs developed by the CDC documents that involving pharmacy participation in patient care is linked to improved cardiovascular outcomes for patients. The CDC guide states that, "collaborative drug therapy management (CDTM) enabled by a collaborative practice agreement (CPA) is a formal partnership between qualified pharmacists and prescribers to expand a pharmacist's scope of practice. CDTM is a cost-effective strategy for lowering blood pressure, blood sugar, and LDL cholesterol levels; improving treatment quality; and increasing medication adherence" and goes on to say that strong evidence exists that CDTM enabled by a CPA is effective.


Many pharmacies are open evenings and weekends and patients can often walk in without an appointment, which improves access to care, and pharmacists sometimes have more time than physicians do to educate patients regarding their medical conditions and medications. There is also the potential for pharmacists to use telemedicine to improve access to care especially for patients in rural areas.

CLIA approved laboratory testing is now available in many pharmacies, meaning that a patient may be able to go directly to the pharmacy to have their lab tests done and medications ad-

justed. For example, a patient could go to their pharmacy to have their thyroid function tests checked and the pharmacist could then adjust their thyroid dose as needed. For many patients this is a much less expensive alternative to using hospital labs, and it frees up physicians from routine medication management to focus on patients with more complicated medical issues.

Collaborative practice agreements in Wyoming are governed by the Wyoming Board of Pharmacy, and as of early 2019 the Board has now approved a total of eight collaborative practice agreements for providers around the state; it is anticipated that this number will significantly increase over the next few years. While some of these collaborative practice agreements take place at institutions such as the State Hospital in Evanston and the UWFM residency program in Cheyenne, others involve individual primary care providers.

Interested in finding out more about collaborative practice agreements? The Wyoming Board of Pharmacy has a template you can use to help you develop specific agreements with a pharmacy, and the Board can also help you review the statutory rules that govern such arrangements. For example, it is important to have well defined protocols in place such as what to do if a patient is noncompliant, or how to notify the physician in case of an adverse drug reaction. It is also important for the patient to continue as an active patient with the physician and for the physician to closely collaborate with the pharmacist and to specifically let the pharmacist know what you want them to do.

Collaborative practice agreements are an effective way improve clinical outcomes. Medication management provided through a pharmacy may often be less expensive and more accessible for patients than similar services obtained through a hospital lab or medical clinic and can potentially be provided using telemedicine. For more information consider talking with your local pharmacist or contacting the Wyoming Board of Pharmacy. 

***Citation: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Best Practices for Cardiovascular Disease Prevention Programs: A Guide to Effective Health Care System Interventions and Community Programs Linked to Clinical Services. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US Dept of Health and Human Services; 2017. www.cdc.gov/dhds/pubs/docs/Best-Practices-Guide-508.pdf.**