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## Pharmacists Role in Preventing Drug Abuse

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## **Pharmacists Role in Preventing Drug Abuse**

In 2019, there were approximately 332,000 pharmacists active in the US workforce, *Data USA, 2019*. A survey of 1,700 American adults, discovered, that 34% of Americans still rely on healthcare providers such as pharmacists, for information in relation their health, *KRC Research, 2018*. Pharmacists are one of the three most trusted health care professions and were found to be the second most trusted source for health information by Americans in 2005. Blendon et al., 2006 found, that information from pharmacist was trusted by 67%, of participants in their survey. One of the oaths pledged by pharmacist is, '*I will apply my knowledge, experience, and skills to the best of my ability to assure optimal outcomes for all patients*,' *AACP Board of Directors and the APhA Board of Trustees, 2021*. In recent times however, this begs to question, is the goal still optimal outcomes for patients, or optimal outcomes for sustained revenues? The average American visits their pharmacy 775% more times, than their primary health care provider. It is quite alarming though, that pharmacists spend on average only 10% of their days with their patients, *Gebhart, 2019*.

There exists an exponential opportunity for pharmacists to help curb the \$35 billion drug abuse cost. Approximately, 53 million Americans have used or misused prescription drugs, *National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics, 2022*. Annually, 16.3 million Americans misuse prescriptions, with 3.7 million misuses occurring with first time users, *National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics, 2022*. Pharmacists may help reduce prescription misuse. This action can be taken through education, quality time, training and consistency with the use of drug monitoring programs.

### **Drug Monitoring Program**

The implementation of Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMP), was created in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century with the aim of curbing the drug abuse crisis, *Brandeis University, 2018*. PDMP created a method to effectively manage patient's medication data and prescriptions. Even with this robust system, there has been an increase of prescription drug misuse by more than 250% in the last twenty years, *SingleCare, 2022*. Notably, there was a 5% increase from 2018 to 2019 and a 29.9% increase in deaths by overdose between 2019 to 2020, with the use of illicit drugs and prescription opioids, *National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2022*. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) led, electronic prescription initiative for controlled substances, SAMHSA, 2017, allows tracking of potential fraudulent prescriptions. This initiative enables reduction through, creation and activations of workflows that allow the pharmacists, to block fraudulent prescriptions and identify the abusers. By relentless use of this system, it may serve as a deterrent to illegal activities.

### **Quality Time with Patients**

The role of pharmacists as a '*trusted source*' for information by many Americans, is one solution to lessen the drug abuse epidemic. Increased pharmacist to patient interaction is required, to provide quality care, instead of aiming to reach a daily target of prescriptions to be filled. By increasing time spent with patients: clear instructions on how to use a specified drug can be taught, with increased awareness of highly addictive drugs, prevention methods, alternative and coping techniques, consequences of sharing medication, storage and disposal of prescription drugs can be communicated. Many pharmacies, have "take-back days" and the DEA also has authorized locations, where patients are encouraged to take back their unused medications for proper disposal, *DEA, SAMHSA, 2017*. Quality time, in addition to having a united interactive and educational program, will help communities to identify abuser behaviors, signals for prescription misuse, signs of overdose, administration of naloxone (opioid antagonist), and side effects to prevent further addition to the current drug abuse burden, *SAMHSA, 2017*.

## **Training**

All pharmacies and pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, peers and employees are to be trained on policies and procedures for substance abuse, recovery methods and coping and support systems for the betterment of their patients, *The American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, 2013*. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), for example, offers training in opioid pharmacotherapy, *SAMHSA, 2017*, to enable safe and effective use of opioids, which is abused by 9.3 million Americans annually, *National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics, 2022*. This training should be a mandatory requirement, not just limited to opioids but other substances of abuse.

## **Integrity**

Integrity should be at the core of all actions taken by a pharmacists. Enabling a patient, peer or coworker due to familiarity should be discouraged and they are to be denied access to perform duties when impaired by substances of abuse.

## **Conclusion**

Collaboration and time is integral in curbing prescription misuse. By having pharmacists spend a little more time can go a long way, through education and may lead to the change we are aiming to see in prescription misuse and drug abuse.

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