

Why should pharma re-evaluate the role of the pharmacist?

Community pharmacists need support from pharma.

Primary healthcare doesn't begin and end with general practitioners (GPs) and surgery staff; comprehensive community-based, primary healthcare requires a cooperative and integrated network of medical and allied health professionals.

Within this network, community pharmacists are frequently a first point of contact for many service users. Community pharmacists require an encyclopaedic knowledge of medications and treatments to be ready to answer the questions of any service user that walks through their door.

In the UK, 96% of the population can access their nearest pharmacy by walking or by public transport, resulting in an estimated 1.6 million visits to a pharmacy per day. The average adult in England accesses a pharmacy 14 times per year, and 1 in 10 seek health advice from pharmacists.

Besides dispensing medications and giving health advice, community pharmacists also provide a wide range of private clinical services including vaccinations, minor ailments service (e.g. for ear infections), allergy testing, smoking cessation, alcohol reduction and weight management. Operating under private Patient Group Directions within these services, many pharmacies now provide over 150 prescription-only medicines direct to patients without the need for a GP appointment.

Even from a purely commercial perspective, pharmacists are clearly key stakeholders and collaborators of the pharma industry, after all it is pharmacists who usually distribute pharma products.

In the era of COVID-19, many primary care services are adopting telehealth practices to minimize exposure and transmission. This has resulted in pharmacies seeing a rise in referrals from GP surgeries for clinical assessments such as blood pressure and weight that are often required as part of prescriptions review services.

However, amidst this significant increase in workload, the pandemic has also delivered a financial blow to pharmacies too. Many have reported having to begin charging for their specialist services to plug the financial gap.

Community pharmacists are also now plugging the clinical gap as primary care services adapt to the pandemic, oftentimes having to catch the service users that have fallen through the cracks or unable to access adequate care from GP surgeries, even through the use of telehealth.

Why should pharma support community pharmacists? **They are the backbone of community-based healthcare.**