

# Pharmacists' role expected to expand over next decade amid the pandemic and provider shortages

January 12 2022

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New research released today by Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health and Express Scripts Pharmacy, an Evernorth company, reveals that amid growing provider shortages, pharmacists in the U.S. are well-trusted by patients and projected to play an increasingly integral role in care management.

The Prescription of Trust report, which surveyed more than 3,000 patients, 1,000 pharmacists, and 500 providers (including physicians and nurse practitioners), was designed to more deeply understand the expanding role of pharmacists in transforming patient care. It is the largest study of its kind ever conducted and is the first to include the voice of patients.

"The results of the report are clear. Most people trust pharmacists to play a greater role in providing their care. As the shortage of doctors and nurses persists, and as complex new therapies and digital [health](#) care technology solutions are developed, the role of the [pharmacist](#) will continue to evolve," said John McHugh, MBA, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the Department of Health Policy and Management at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health.

Key findings of the survey, conducted from November to December 2021, include:

## **Pharmacists will expand responsibilities**

Looking toward the field of pharmacy in 2030, a majority of pharmacists see a transition from transactional care to more direct patient care responsibilities.

At the forefront of this trend are pharmacists in ambulatory clinics, [health systems](#) (hospitals) and home delivery pharmacies, who already often serve as specialists advising patients with specific diseases or

interact with a larger health team to help manage complex patient care.

## **Providers, patients trust pharmacists**

Nearly 80 percent of patients said they see pharmacists as an integral part of their health care team.

Providers reported a high level of trust, often exceeding 90 percent, in pharmacists' current professional activities, including dispensing medications, communicating with [health professionals](#) and patients about potential adverse drug interactions, counseling patients on their medications, and administering vaccines. Notably, providers who collaborate with pharmacists have increasing trust in pharmacists providing direct patient care and prescribing medications.

## **Advanced care requires advanced training**

Pharmacists recognize that patients need more consistent clinical counseling and disease education, but say training will be a focus in key areas to fill gaps in [patient care](#). More than half (53.3%) of pharmacists agreed their current training and education is sufficient to manage patients. However, pharmacists did identify opportunities for additional training in chronic disease education, diagnosing, and prescribing.

## **As roles evolve, so does patient engagement**

The study shows that nearly half (49.7%) of patients would find it very helpful to have routine testing and medical visits done from home. More than half of home delivery pharmacists, like those at Express Scripts Pharmacy, report engaging more with patients via telepharmacy, while about 15 percent of retail pharmacists report using telepharmacy. Of pharmacists who use this technology, more than a third say it gives them more time to interact with patients, allowing them to provide crucial

information and support when—and where—patients need it most.

"While the role of pharmacists has been expanding in some areas of health care, the COVID pandemic has spotlighted their accessibility and the trust people have in them as health care professionals," said Susan Peppers, RPh, vice president of Express Scripts Pharmacy, one of the nation's largest and most experienced home delivery pharmacies that fills 281 million prescriptions every year. "Beyond dispensing prescription medications and providing medication advice, many of our 1,000 Express Scripts Pharmacy pharmacists are already specially trained in specific diseases allowing them to discuss disease and medication management directly with a patient as well as in conjunction with their health care provider team. The Prescription of Trust report confirms that the model of care we have in place at Express Scripts Pharmacy is set to support patients into the future of pharmacy."

Today, America's pharmacists are beginning to expand their roles in the health care continuum with wellness screenings, telepharmacy counseling, providing diagnosis for acute conditions and prescribing medications to treat them.

"As we look at the emerging forces shaping the future of health care, it is clear that accelerated pharmacological innovation and expanded pharmacy services are two of the most fundamental driving forces," said Eric Palmer, CEO of Evernorth. "We continue to advance our [pharmacy](#) offerings and provide specialized training for our on-staff pharmacists to support patients with state-of-art care, now and into the future."

**More information:** Report: [d17f9hu9hnb3ar.cloudfront.net/ ... s-public/2022-01/The%20Prescription%20of%20Trust-FINAL.pdf](https://d17f9hu9hnb3ar.cloudfront.net/...s-public/2022-01/The%20Prescription%20of%20Trust-FINAL.pdf)

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

Citation: Pharmacists' role expected to expand over next decade amid the pandemic and provider shortages (2022, January 12) retrieved 23 November 2023 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-01-pharmacists-role-decade-pandemic-shortages.html>

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