

Pharmacists are crucial to care delivery. They consult with patients and staff about medication therapy. Their role has expanded beyond preparing and distributing medications. Duties include:

- » Identifying cost-effective medications for treatment
- » Starting and adjusting medication therapy as authorized by physicians per protocol/collaborative agreement
- » Reviewing physician prescribing decisions and intervening when needed to improve safety, affordability or clinical quality
- » Educating health care providers, patients and families
- » Managing patient adherence to medication
- » Ensuring safe storage of medications, especially narcotics, vaccines and high risk/value products

Pharmacists help fill the physician and nurse workforce gap. They engage in patient care through medication education and management. They are key to managing the medication supply chain, optimizing medication use and maintaining medication costs. They can work in hospital, ambulatory and home care settings.

BACKGROUND

As health care transforms, pharmacy is in the middle of it. Medication therapy is a key way to prevent illness and to heal. Also, technology has changed how pharmacists communicate with patients, prepare medications and deliver medications.

Competition is fierce. Amazon and other untraditional players look to speed delivery and enhance patient experience. Pharmacies are testing drones and storage lockers for delivery.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacists have had a critical role in vaccine administration. COVID-19 also led some pharmacists to work remotely.

Two more key issues include opioid misuse and aging Americans. Some geriatric patients take up to 20 medications — a challenge to manage.

At Kaiser Permanente, supply and demand of pharmacists is stable. During the pandemic, members —75% who take 3 or more medications — have increased use of mail order pharmacy and ordering prescriptions by mobile app.

To boost medication adherence, Kaiser Permanente is trying smart pill bottles, which provide reminders to take pills. To improve communication, the organization is experimenting with a pharmacy dashboard that families can also access. Meanwhile, KP Pharmacy continues to review prescribing practices and security protocols to keep patients and staff safe.

OUTLOOK

U.S. employment of pharmacists is projected to grow slowly — 2% by 2031. They'll continue to use expanded education requirements and certifications to specialize. In ambulatory settings, this includes home infusion, diabetes and oncology. At call centers, medication adherence. In hospitals, antibiotic stewardship and pediatric care.

State licensing boards may continue to expand the pharmacist scope and responsibilities. Pharmacy roles and specialties will likely keep increasing.

RISING DEMAND: Kaiser Permanente's pharmacist jobs have grown 45% since 2015



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EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Most settings require pharmacists to have a PharmD degree (typically 8 years). Sometimes that is followed by 2 years of residency and/or fellowship in specialized areas of practice as a licensed pharmacist. To practice, pharmacists must pass 2 exams: the North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination (NAPLEX) and a state licensing exam.

Many professional organizations represent pharmacists. The American Pharmacists Association (APhA) and American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) are the main ones. Each has a national office and state chapters.


TAKE ACTION

Employees: Explore career paths at kpcareerplanning.org/paths. Partnership union members can talk with an education trust career counselor. Learn more at LMPartnership.org/workforce.

Managers: Adapt to emerging trends. Talk with a Workforce of the Future implementation specialist to discuss training and education opportunities (kpcareerplanning.org/prd/contact_us.php).

CURRENT CORE JOB SKILLS

- » Chemistry, biology and math
- » Critical thinking
- » Pharmacological and biopharmaceutical principles
- » Familiarity with medical terminology, disease states and related information for medical management
- » Aseptic (absence of pathogens) techniques
- » Emergency medication and drug monitoring
- » Proficient use of technologies (such as phone systems, electronic medical records, order entry systems and medical devices)
- » Effective written and verbal communication with patients and staff
- » Drug utilization review
- » Safe use of medications
- » Understanding of state and federal regulations
- » Inventory control methods
- » In-depth knowledge in specialty areas, including pediatrics, oncology, HIV, diabetes, geriatrics, infusion and mental health, depending on role as a pharmacist

EMERGING CORE SKILLS

- » Strong analytic skills
- » Skills related to research
- » Ability to use and learn new forms of technology and tele-pharmacy
- » Genetics for personalized medication
- » Resilience
- » Language skills, particularly in Spanish and other languages, depending on market
- » Motivational interviewing skills

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