

Creating demand for patient services

There is an old saying, “To understand another, you must walk in his shoes.” Our encounters as patients, or those of our families, give us a deeper understanding of the patient experience. What circumstances make you, as a patient, feel comfortable asking questions, seeking advice, or placing trust in a health care practitioner? How can these experiences be applied in your pharmacy, creating a welcoming atmosphere for patients? Establishing, expanding, and maintaining a medication therapy management (MTM) service depend on patient interest and demand for service, which ultimately stem from patients’ personal experiences in the pharmacy and with the pharmacist.

As pharmacists in the community, we are keenly aware of the many barriers that hinder our ability to provide a host of patient-care services. How can we work within the confines of those barriers to establish a patient-friendly atmosphere that lays the groundwork for a strong MTM practice? Creating an environment where patients are comfortable talking with the pharmacist, asking questions, and sharing concerns of care can be accomplished with a few simple steps.

Finding, gathering resources

You may begin by becoming familiar with local and regional resources available for patients. This is an opportunity to engage staff and build their interest in patient care by asking them to assist you in making community contacts. Staff can call local area hospital education centers to learn about classes and seminars available to patients, as well as specialty services in such areas as nutrition, depression, and alcohol dependence counseling. As you locate these services, create a reference book

in the pharmacy with contact information for each community resource. Consider how you can partner with these community groups to help them promote their services while caring for patients in your pharmacy.

Creating an educational resource center focused on the needs of the particular population you serve demonstrates to these patients that you are interested in their overall health care. A host of resources are available to assist you in building such a center, including pharmacy-based patient education from APhA (www.aphanet.org), immunization information and updates from CDC (www.cdc.gov/nip/home-hcp.htm), heart health education and evaluation tools from the American Heart Association (www.americanheart.org), diabetes education and resources from the American Diabetes Association (www.diabetes.org), a variety of health-related patient education topics from the American Academy of Family Physicians (www.familydoctor.org), pulmonary disease–related information from the American Lung Association (www.lungusa.org), and cardiovascular and pulmonary education from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (www.nhlbi.nih.gov).

Health awareness can also be promoted to coincide with monthly themed national awareness campaigns. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services maintains a comprehensive list of health-related observances on its Web site (www.healthfinder.gov/library/nho). These awareness campaigns can serve as a springboard for patient education tips, prescription bag stuffers, and staff education. Also consider monthly staff education tips to foster learning about the monthly topic and its application to patients. This can be accomplished

through a discussion series, creative handouts, or self-assessments.

Health screening events can be another way to engage staff and patients in learning more about their health. You can partner with local or regional services to host screening events on hand, or you can host them yourself with resources available at your pharmacy. The Mayo Clinic provides a Web-based tool to inform patients of their individual needs for screening based on age and gender (www.mayoclinic.com/health/health-screening/W000112).

What’s the impact?

Finally, consider what data you need to collect to evaluate these community health services and demonstrate their impact on patient care and your pharmacy. Outcome measures can include actual numbers of patients seen, noting those who are new to the pharmacy and those who come back for more information or are referred by their physician. Clinical outcome measures for health screenings should include number of patients not meeting their disease goals (i.e., lowering blood pressure or blood glucose). Patient feedback can be an important step in gaining resources to expand your services. You might consider having a patient satisfaction survey available or encouraging patients to contact your employer and/or local legislative representatives (by phone or e-mail) with feedback about your services.

Implementation of services related to public health needs creates an opportunity to dialog with patients. As your community pharmacy becomes a resource-rich environment for patients to obtain health information, patients can begin to appreciate the value of personal contact with the pharmacist. Creating an environment where patients feel comfortable learning about their health concerns can provide a solid foundation on which you can build your MTM practice.

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