
EDITORIAL

THE PHARMACIST IN THE COVID-19 ERA

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It has been more than 18 months since Covid-19 changed the world. Patients are still reporting different effects and symptoms including death. The pharmaceutical industry is working round the clock to provide the best vaccines while tackling supply chain issues. Timely vaccine access and coverage globally is a matter of life and death. The emergence of new variants reported in different continents has impacted on travel and tourism. Where does pharmaceutical care come in?

In the UK, Hospital pharmacists working in vaccination centres and hospital hubs have been given the “lead responsibility” for ensuring COVID-19 vaccines are safely handled and administered. Low and middle income countries are yet to acknowledge fully the role Pharmacists could play in managing this pandemic. Pharmacists globally require a common approach to vaccination to enhance the access and distribution of safe and effective vaccines.

In the US, the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program for COVID-19 Vaccination which is a collaboration between the federal government, states and territories, and several pharmacy networks are increasing access to COVID-19 vaccination in retail pharmacies. A clear program and schedule for vaccination will reduce infection rates particularly among vulnerable groups including the elderly and those with underlying conditions.

Clear patient education and counseling by Pharmacists especially the community Pharmacist is vital in developing

countries where the majority of patients and clients seek first-line help prior to visiting hospital. This is part of primary health care. Pharmacists and the pharmacy workforce are frontline workers dispensing medication to patients and providing essential counseling and information. This contributes to high quality pharmacotherapy. Vaccination in retail pharmacies is an expanded role that is the future for a successful Universal Health Coverage program.

The inclusion of Pre-Service training in vaccination for Pharmacy programs is long overdue. These skills are required beyond the rich knowledge base of medicines and technologies that Pharmacists possess. A robust program that offers certification to licensed Pharmacists to administer vaccines will have a positive impact on the general population and ease the burden experienced in an overstretched national health system.

Continuous Professional Development among Pharmacists harnessing their IT skills will make them more adaptable to the ever-changing landscape brought about by the pandemic. Tele pharmacy opportunities are poorly explored but could create new business opportunities once the right infrastructure is in place. Self-care among Pharmacists and the pharmacy workforce by ensuring that everyone is vaccinated provides safer work spaces and better mental health while attending to patients and clients.