

Advancing pharmacy practices in vaccination: Unlocking vaccine confidence

Report from a FIP
insight board

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FIP Development Goals



International
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Colophon

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1 Introduction

Immunisation is key to advancing universal health coverage (UHC) by protecting individuals and their communities from communicable diseases. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), immunisation is one of the most cost-effective public health interventions that protects individuals throughout life and at different ages, and reduces illnesses and disabilities caused by life-threatening preventable diseases.¹

The International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) strives to advance the pharmacy profession globally, regionally, and nationally through its [21 Development Goals \(DGs\)](#) which were launched in September 2020. Of the 21 FIP DGs, FIP DG 16 (Communicable diseases), highlights the importance of vaccination in protecting societies from getting infected with vaccine-preventable diseases, as well as the critical role that pharmacists play in improving vaccination through different strategies and services.

Pharmacists from around the world contributed to optimising vaccination coverage rates, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, through a variety of roles that range from advocating to administering vaccination. Despite the significant role of pharmacists in vaccination, they still face many barriers such as vaccine hesitancy. Building trust in vaccines, or what is known as vaccine confidence, can be impacted by numerous factors including cultural, social and political influences. Therefore, as the most accessible healthcare providers, pharmacists can address the concerns that individuals might have about vaccination through effective communication and education to boost their vaccine confidence level.

FIP, being the leader of pharmacy globally, continues to expand its presence within pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences, and to influence policymaking, education and science institutions to become better. As part of its efforts on vaccination, FIP hosted an insight board in October 2023 exploring the factors that affect vaccine confidence and public trust in vaccines as well as the strategies that optimise vaccine acceptance. Experts in pharmacy and immunisation from different parts of the world joined the insight board to address the following questions:

1. What strategies are effective in building vaccine confidence among patients and the community?
2. Can you share examples of successful initiatives or communication methods that boost vaccine confidence in practice?
3. What role can pharmacists play in enhancing vaccine confidence, and what resources or training do they need to do so effectively?
4. What are the main challenges in increasing vaccine confidence, and how can they be overcome?

This report provides a summary of the insight board discussion as well as the key insights that were shared. It should be noted that the views expressed during the insight board are those of the individuals based on their expertise and experience. They do not represent FIP policy or positions, although they may build on existing positions and statements.

2 Successful strategies and examples in building vaccine confidence

Participants discussed strategies that are essential in building vaccine confidence, and some shared success stories and examples from different countries in which certain methods proved to achieve positive results. Several themes emerged from the discussions, all of which are discussed below.

2.1 Communication

One of the recurring themes that emerged throughout the discussion was the communication strategies used with patients and the public, particularly with regard to vaccination.

“It is important to deliver the right information to the right ears in the right manner.”

Effective communication starts with the dissemination of clear, simple, and accessible information. Ensuring that vaccine information is communicated using simple language and terms is essential to help individuals grasp the benefits of vaccines. When clinical evidence-based information is communicated in a simple manner, individuals can understand the information clearly and feel more confident and more involved in the decision-making process around vaccines. This could also help patients feel more empowered to take control of their health.

“The risk perception of the public or the patient is completely different or is based on different grounds compared to the perception of healthcare providers. The healthcare provider perception is based on science, while the public or the patient’s perception is influenced by what they hear or see in the media. Using the right communication techniques to address those factors is crucial.”

“One benefit of giving that information to the individuals is to make them feel confident and that what they’re getting is something for their own safety.”

The right communication strategy can not only empower individuals to make better decisions regarding their health, but also to take part in contributing to a healthier community. Vaccines protect not only individuals from diseases, but also entire communities from the spread of diseases through the establishment of herd immunity. When a significant portion of the population is immunised against a specific disease, it creates a collective defence system, making it difficult for an infectious agent to spread. This indirect protection extends to individuals who may be unable to receive vaccines due to medical reasons, particularly in vulnerable populations as well as at-risk groups. Patients and individuals can therefore be empowered to have a positive impact on the community they live in and to protect themselves as well as those around them.

“It’s not so much for their individual safety, but for the safety of others. As we speak to people about the greater good, we would also find a good way of building their confidence in the whole concept of vaccination and how they should participate.”

Another important point mentioned was the manner in which information is conveyed to individuals and members of the community. One participant highlighted the need to tailor the communication approach to match that of the patient. The factors that can result in reduced confidence in a vaccine or give rise to reservations and concerns are diverse. Therefore, addressing them requires an individualised, case-by-case approach.

“Using a combination of generic messaging about the value of vaccines along with a very customised, individualised approach of listening carefully and using the right types of language and evidence to address any specific types of concerns that people may have.”

One participant shared an example of taking a presumptive approach when making recommendations. The presumptive approach assumes a positive response towards vaccinations and guides individuals to getting the vaccine. Another participant highlighted the efficacy of using robust, personalised vaccine recommendations, such as a pharmacist

disclosing their personal experience or mentioning vaccinating their child. Participants have also mentioned that healthcare providers should not be discouraged if they are unable to persuade a patient to receive a vaccine. Instead, they should persist in their efforts to increase vaccine confidence and uptake. Furthermore, providers should take advantage of all patient visits and consultations, even those unrelated to vaccines, as opportunities to advocate for and promote vaccination.

2.2 Health and vaccine literacy

As part of the discussions on vaccine confidence, participants mentioned the importance of being aware of the health and vaccine literacy levels when communicating with patients or the public. Recognising and understanding differences in literacy levels is fundamental to addressing vaccine hesitancy effectively, ensuring that information is not only accurate but also accessible and comprehensible to diverse audiences. This consideration is essential to fostering a transparent and informed dialogue that promotes trust and encourages informed decision-making regarding vaccines while improving health literacy and vaccine confidence within a community.

Effective communication can provide a lot of insight on the level of an individual's health literacy and awareness as well as a clearer understanding of the level of vaccine hesitancy that exists within a community. This can be done by giving individuals the space to share their concerns on vaccines and to be listened to. This can in return allow for use of targeted methods and strategies that would most effectively increase vaccine confidence within that community and stop the spread of misinformation.

“Many who come to the pharmacy may have concerns or questions, so listening carefully to where that concern is coming from and what the question is reveals a lot about an individual's health literacy and knowledge.”

“We have to be ready to address questions and concerns around vaccine efficacy or safety with evidence-based information that is translated into a language that everyone can understand. They might be rooted in the components or elements that constitute a vaccine, or they could be more philosophical or ideological questions. For instance, individuals adhering to a vegan lifestyle may express concerns about vaccines containing animal-derived components.”

One participant mentioned how, in Canada, efforts aimed at increasing health literacy include associating the value of vaccines with other medical treatments. For instance, equating the value of vaccines to taking blood pressure pills to avert high blood pressure and strokes contributed to promoting vaccination. This approach aimed to emphasise that vaccines, like other preventive interventions, play a crucial role in maintaining and enhancing overall health.

Another example mentioned was Project ECHO, originating at the University of New Mexico, which is a global initiative focused on increasing knowledge and awareness of health information through empowering local communities to access expert knowledge wherever they live, such as through virtual consultations.

2.3 Collaborations with stakeholders

Constant and consistent messages that increase vaccine confidence requires the collaboration among stakeholders involved. This includes working with local governments, policymakers, healthcare providers and, most importantly, the public. One example was mentioned highlighting the importance of working with community leaders and influencers. Leveraging the credibility of trusted community figures such as faith leaders or educators to convey accurate information helps counteract misinformation and builds confidence within communities.

“It is not only about the message but also the messenger. You want to work with the local people who are trusted. It may be people with the same disease that can have the biggest effect when communicating with the public. These communities have local leaders, who might be religious groups. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that we empower individuals who serve as champions in the community. We need to build more vaccine champions in the community who can continue and sustain these efforts in the long run.”

One participant shared an example from Baltimore, USA, where formal listening sessions were held and community members were invited to discuss a certain topic such as vaccines to gain a deeper understanding of community dynamics. Insights on what methods could work or not work were then gathered to collaboratively develop messages for initiatives like vaccination campaigns. These messages were tailored to address the areas that the community care about. This strategic approach not only fosters trust and confidence in the health system but also contributes to improved health outcomes.

2.4 Media outlets

Participants highlighted the use of media outlets to increase vaccine confidence. Accurate information can be shared in newspapers, television channels, radio stations, magazines, websites and other platforms that distribute content to a broad audience. These outlets play a crucial role in providing information and shaping public opinion. They can also help stop the spread of false information or common misconceptions. Participants also mentioned the use of different platforms to reach different groups. For instance, younger generations are most likely to use social media and the internet to find information whereas older populations may often rely on television or newspapers for information.

A participant cited a case in Costa Rica where pharmacists effectively utilised social media and messaging platforms by sharing posts, extending their reach to friends and family groups and enhancing vaccine awareness. Another participant highlighted the underrepresentation of pharmacists on these platforms, emphasising the potential impact of their presence to raise awareness about their vital role in vaccination and contribute to enhancing knowledge and awareness of vaccines.

2.5 Lessons learned

Participants highlighted that some lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic can be useful in addressing vaccine confidence.

“We don’t have to wait until we have another pandemic. We can have better organised roll-out solutions for vaccinations.”

Consistent and continuous efforts to address vaccine confidence are key to ensure consistent protection from preventable diseases. Proactive measures, such as meticulous planning for seasonal influenza, involve establishing comprehensive vaccination strategies and policies that address all contributing factors to ensure the achievement of optimal vaccination rates.

3 Barriers to vaccine confidence

3.1 Time

One of the main challenges that pharmacists face when addressing vaccine hesitancy is the time it requires for them to do it, among the other duties and tasks that they need to take care of. It requires spending more time talking to patients to address their questions and concerns and to increase their confidence in vaccination, and pharmacists may not have the time to address the issue with each patient individually.

“The timing is one of the main challenges because understanding the underlying issues of confidence, like what’s driving an individual’s hesitation takes more than just those few minutes of pharmacist-patient interaction to figure out.”

It can be challenging for a pharmacist to find the time to attend to each patient’s needs, assess their health and vaccine literacy, and then tailor the communication approach accordingly.

“To overcome the challenges requires the knowledge, awareness and trust of vaccines to be addressed early on in people’s lives so that they can take those attitudes with them throughout their life course.”

3.2 Myths and misinformation

The pandemic shed light on how quickly false information and myths around vaccines can develop. This poses a major challenge when addressing the public’s confidence in vaccines as it leads to distrust in vaccines and the healthcare system in general. Misinformation can also lead to increased fear and anxiety about a certain vaccine and eventually lower vaccine uptake rates.

“Nowadays, people don’t often read long articles. They tend to skim through headlines or Twitter posts. Not everything related to vaccination can be easily distilled, and misinformation and disinformation are fuelled by our challenge to communicate concisely, frequently.”

“There is more and more emphasis on inoculating pharmacists against misinformation, and that means basically identifying logical errors like ways in which the social media is fuelling fear and anger. It’s not feasible for us to predict every potential challenge or method by which vaccines can be undermined. However, we can proactively identify logical errors and encourage individuals to recognise them beforehand.”

3.3 Pharmacist involvement in vaccination

There is a lack of awareness of the role of pharmacists as educators and trustworthy health information resources. Pharmacists, with their extensive knowledge and accessibility, have the capacity to provide valuable information and guidance to the public. Overcoming this challenge involves highlighting and promoting the multifaceted role of pharmacists as educators, ensuring that their expertise is recognised, and fostering a greater understanding of the vital contribution they make to public health.

Concerning the involvement of pharmacists in fostering vaccine confidence, participants highlighted a challenge faced by pharmacists: their limited engagement in vaccination efforts during the early stages. Integrating pharmacists early in the process can offer valuable insights into enhancing vaccine confidence. Pharmacists, being the most accessible healthcare providers deeply rooted in their communities, possess unique opportunities for interaction with patients and community members.

“One of the challenges of increasing vaccine confidence, particularly within pharmacy, is that we may come into the game a bit too late. Vaccine attitudes and behaviours are firmly established by adulthood when we are trying to overcome and address them.”

3.2 Pharmacist education and training

Another challenge identified was pharmacy education and training in increasing vaccine confidence. It would require the integration of thorough vaccine education within pharmacy curricula, ensuring that pharmacists are not only well educated on the science of vaccines but also equipped with the necessary skills to address vaccine hesitancy. This encompasses developing effective communication skills and fostering cultural awareness, enabling pharmacists to navigate diverse patient perspectives and contribute to overcoming vaccine hesitancy challenges.

“I find that much of the training for pharmacists is focused on knowledge, particularly about vaccines and their side effects. However, we allocate very little time to teaching communication methods, recognising resistance from people, and navigating through these situations.”

“For vaccine confidence, we must listen, use motivational interviewing, and accept that we’re not going to change someone in one conversation. It might take a few reminders on our end to bring back the conversations, to be able to build different strategies. I find that, in terms of our training, we focus too much on knowledge.”

“Giving pharmacists the opportunity to experience real-life situations regarding vaccination, possibly through face-to-face training, could work better.”

In addition, participants mentioned the role that pharmacy technicians can have in directing patients to the right resources, spreading accurate health information and stopping the spread of misinformation.

3.3 Pharmacist incentives

Participants discussed offering incentives to pharmacists with the aim to motivate them to engage in conversations that build trust in vaccines, convince people of their importance, and boost vaccination rates. Creating a supportive environment for pharmacists to actively contribute to these important discussions is essential.

“Pharmacists should have some incentives to really discuss vaccination and bring this conversation. This is a very important part of making people trust vaccines, convincing them and increasing uptake.”

4 The role of pharmacists in vaccine confidence

Participants discussed the various roles that pharmacists can take in vaccination, but particularly their role in building vaccine confidence.

“We [pharmacists] can be advocates, we can be facilitators, and we can also administer vaccines.”

“We can all agree that pharmacists are best positioned to carry out this message and improve confidence.”

Pharmacists are well-positioned to provide insights on where vaccine hesitancy stems from and to educate the public about the importance of vaccines, providing accurate information on vaccine safety, efficacy and potential side effects. They can address concerns and misconceptions, offering reliable guidance to enhance public understanding. These concerns could be related to drug interactions with vaccines or taking different vaccines at the same time.

“There’s often a lack of confidence in getting vaccines alongside other medications — uncertainty about when to get them, how many can be received simultaneously, and the interactions between them. Therefore, both pharmacists and physicians have a crucial role in providing a better understanding of interactions.”

Pharmacists, especially those in community settings, can play a pivotal role in actively promoting vaccination within their communities, particularly for older groups and vulnerable populations. Using culturally suitable communication methods, pharmacists can better reach these groups and enhance vaccine confidence through educational initiatives, informal conversations with their patients, and fostering open dialogue. This can raise awareness not only about the benefits of vaccines in preventing certain diseases, but also the downstream benefits of vaccines such as the prevention of health complications and antibiotic resistance, the reduction of healthcare costs and the protection of vulnerable groups.

“Pharmacists can discuss the challenges faced by many who cannot afford to miss work. With regards to the flu vaccine, it may lead to shortening the duration of the illness, which is a significant benefit even if one still contracts the flu. Engaging in more genuine conversations is important. It’s not solely about preventing influenza; it’s about understanding the real impact on one’s life.”

Pharmacists can also take part in informal discussions with their patients about the benefits of a certain vaccines not only to their health but also to the health of those around them. Additionally, pharmacists can spread awareness, educate their patients and correct misinformation regarding vaccines, all of which can lead to improved vaccine confidence and higher vaccine uptake rates. One participant mentioned the role of pharmacists in infodemic management, which is the management of an overflow of information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak.

“We have the opportunity to roll out training globally for families on infodemic management. This ensures that misconceptions can be corrected right from within the pharmacy. We can help dispel misconceptions about vaccines by providing information. Having accurate information makes it difficult for individuals to harbour misconceptions.”

5 "Unlocking vaccine confidence: A pharmacy perspective" - Digital event summary

FIP hosted a series of three digital events "Advancing pharmacy practices in vaccination" following this insight board which aimed to provide insights into three key topics to advance pharmacy-based vaccination services: vaccine confidence, preparing for winter, and reaching at-risk and vulnerable groups. The first episode of the series "[Unlocking vaccine confidence: A pharmacy perspective](#)" focuses on addressing vaccine confidence, enhancing public trust in vaccines and discussing strategies to strengthen vaccine acceptance.

The event aimed to comprehensively understand vaccine confidence and the drivers of hesitancy and scepticism within the public, investigate effective strategies for enhancing vaccine trust and expand into methods to foster confidence in pharmacy-based vaccination services.

The event was moderated by Lina Bader, FIP lead for equity, sustainability policy and development. The panellists were: Mary S. Hayney, professor at the University of Wisconsin Madison School of Pharmacy, United States; Esther McNamara, senior health policy lead at the International Longevity Centre, United Kingdom; and Melody L. Berg, editorial director at the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, United States. Below is a summary of the event outcomes.

Prof. Hayney discussed the multifaceted aspects of vaccine confidence, emphasising its definition according to the US Centers for Disease Control: the belief in the efficacy, safety and trustworthiness of vaccines within the medical system. The spectrum of vaccine demand spans from those eagerly seeking vaccines to adamant refusals, with a pivotal middle ground necessitating attention to address questions and provide information. Prof. Hayney highlighted how health literacy is intricately linked to vaccine confidence, involving understanding vaccine information, weighing benefits and side effects and navigating health systems. However, health literacy alone does not ensure vaccine uptake, as social, cultural and psychological factors, misinformation and personal experiences influence decisions. Together, education and health literacy contribute to health equity by improving access and empowering individuals to make informed decisions on vaccines. Strategies for health equity encompass culturally sensitive communication, addressing health beliefs, and reducing barriers to information. Prof. Hayney also highlighted how advocacy emerges as a pivotal factor in improving vaccine access, involving increased pharmacist involvement in immunisation programmes, participation in immunisation events, and collaboration with healthcare providers. These activities collectively contribute to broader efforts aimed at enhancing vaccine access.

Ms McNamara presented the results of a report from the International Longevity Centre UK on vaccine confidence in Central and Eastern Europe, covering 11 countries in the region and assessing their performance in childhood and adult immunisation. She highlighted a delay in adult immunisation compared with Western Europe. She examined various factors affecting vaccine confidence, including ideological and practical considerations. She provided recommendations for EU representatives, national governments, and health leaders. The report emphasised the complexity of building long-term confidence in vaccination and discussed how cultural and historical aspects can impact vaccine uptake. Ms McNamara underscored notable differences in attitudes toward vaccination across Europe, emphasising the need to understand factors influencing confidence and uptake in Central and Eastern European countries, where vaccination rates are suboptimal. The findings and recommendations offer valuable insights for global stakeholders and policymakers, stressing the importance of addressing cultural, historical and practical factors to bolster confidence in vaccination and enhance uptake across the lifespan.

Ms Berg emphasised the crucial role of pharmacists in enhancing vaccine confidence. She highlighted that pharmacists can be trained as educators, public health promoters and vaccine providers. Pharmacists are equipped with the necessary counselling and education skills, which are integrated into their pharmacy school curricula. She also stressed the accessibility of pharmacists in addressing public enquiries and dispelling misconceptions about vaccine safety, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. She also highlighted the accessibility of community pharmacies, making them ideal for public health campaigns and the dissemination of information regarding the effectiveness and safety of vaccines. She also pointed out that pharmacists are well-prepared to administer vaccines and possess comprehensive knowledge of the associated benefits and risks, allowing them to directly apply this knowledge to patient care. Ms Berg also discussed some challenges and barriers that pharmacists face, such as time constraints, funding, workforce shortages, the need to enhance pharmacist confidence, and the emergency response in the event of a reaction. To overcome these challenges, she proposed the implementation of various methods, strategies, and policies.

These include establishing vaccine programmes in community pharmacies, fostering collaborative practice agreements and increasing the frequency of vaccine drives and clinics.

The collective insights from the panellists emphasise the critical role of continuous training and education and collaborative efforts in optimising vaccination endeavours. The recommendations provided by the panellists offer valuable guidance for global stakeholders and policymakers to address vaccine confidence, improve uptake rates, and ultimately contribute to better public health outcomes.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the insight board discussions and digital event highlighted key strategies and success stories for building vaccine confidence as well as barriers to vaccine confidence. Some key factors that can help improve vaccine confidence include:

- Effective communication, focusing on clear and accessible information;
- Health and vaccine literacy assessment and improvement using tailored approaches to diverse communities;
- Collaborations among stakeholders, including local leaders and influencers, for spreading accurate vaccine information and countering misinformation;
- Media outlets, both traditional and digital, to spread accurate information; and
- Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic emphasising the need for consistent efforts and organised vaccination strategies.

Some barriers include:

- Time constraints;
- Myths and misinformation;
- Limited pharmacist involvement;
- Pharmacy education and training; and
- Pharmacist incentives for vaccination efforts.

Pharmacists play a central role in advocacy, dispelling myths and promoting vaccine benefits. Integrating them early in vaccination efforts, enhancing their education, and providing incentives are crucial for maximising their impact on public health outcomes. As the world continues to navigate the complexities of vaccination campaigns, the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic underscore the need for sustained efforts and well-organised vaccination strategies. By incorporating these insights into future public health initiatives, communities can foster widespread vaccine confidence and contribute to global efforts in mitigating the impact of infectious diseases.

7 References

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