Global pharmacy trends and implications for self-care

Report from a FIP insight board

2024

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Acknowledgements

Opella.

Sanofi's consumer healthcare business unit

1 Introduction

The landscape of pharmacy and the practice of pharmacy, is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by various global trends that are reshaping the role of pharmacists in healthcare. Following the pandemic and the strain it has put on healthcare systems, it has become increasingly evident that pharmacists play a crucial role in healthcare. Pharmacists have taken on more responsibilities in many countries to reduce the burden on healthcare systems, including administering vaccinations, conducting health checks, prescribing medications, and promoting health literacy. Point-of-care testing at pharmacies and test-and-treat services, such as for strep throat infections or urinary tract infections, a service recently introduced in France and already existing in Wales and other countries, are great examples of how pharmacists can contribute to reducing these burdens.[1]

The health behaviours of individuals have also evolved following the pandemic. People have become increasingly knowledgeable about health and seek greater autonomy in managing their well-being and common ailments. While still relying on face-to-face consultation from a healthcare professional like a pharmacist, they can also access health information online, via applications, or via medicines package inserts to better understand their conditions and how to practice self-care. Self-care can therefore play a crucial role in reducing the burden on emergency and primary care services, and pharmacists can play a key role in empowering patients to practice it.

In 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) has projected a significant shortfall of 10 million health workers globally by 2030, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.[2] This gap presents an opportunity for pharmacists to expand their roles in supporting self-care initiatives. As the healthcare landscape evolves, pharmacists can step into a more proactive role by providing essential services that empower patients to take charge of their own health. This shortfall has narrowed since their prediction in 2016 of 18 million by the same timeline, which has raised questions around how the shortfall was reduced after the pandemic and the associated impact on health workforce.

Despite their potential to enhance self-care, pharmacists face several barriers that can limit their effectiveness. Key factors such as regulatory constraints, pharmacy education and training, and public perceptions of pharmacists' roles need to be addressed to achieve optimal patient outcomes and pharmacists' potential. The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted gaps in health literacy among communities which impact equity and access. It is essential to tackle these challenges to maximise the benefits of evolving pharmacy practices and strengthen the role of pharmacists in promoting self-care.

To emphasise the importance of empowering patients in their health journeys, FIP has established a dedicated programme focused on self-care for the profession globally. Linked to FIP Development Goal 18 (Access to medicines, devices and services), FIP dedicates an exclusive priority programme to self-care. The programme aims to leverage pharmacists' expertise, accessibility and trusted relations in the community to provide quality, evidence-based information and advice on self-care products and strategies to the public, to promote health literacy and to empower patients towards better health and well-being.

In 1998, FIP and The World Self Medication Industry (WSMI), now the Global Self-Care Federation (GSCF), published a joint statement of policy that emphasised the importance of collaboration between pharmacists and the nonprescription medicines industry to promote responsible self-medication, ensuring it is only used when appropriate.[3] The statement also stressed the need for pharmacists and manufacturers to fulfil their responsibilities, advising patients to consult a physician when necessary. A FIP policy statement published in 2017 outlines the dual responsibility of individuals and healthcare providers in promoting health, preventing disease, and managing illness through informed self-care practices. The statement highlights FIP's commitment to advocate for and support pharmacists in their role in developing and providing self-care.[4] In 2019, FIP updated the joint statement of policy with the GSCF on responsible and effective self-care, outlining the collaborative role of the pharmacy profession and the self-care industry in promoting health autonomy and emphasising the importance of self-care as a fundamental component of sustainable healthcare systems, and advocating for informed decision-making and health literacy. The updated statement recognises pharmacists' key role in providing unbiased, evidence-based advice on self-care products and services, thus empowering individuals and communities to manage their health proactively. In 2022, FIP also launched a handbook aimed at equipping pharmacists with the strategies, tools, and education required to promote self-care.[5] More recently, in 2023, FIP launched a report that examines the evolving role of community pharmacists in promoting self-care, highlighting their understanding, educational needs, and use of digital tools, while identifying challenges and enablers for effective support.[6]

At the 82nd FIP World Congress of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences in Cape Town, South Africa, which took place in September 2024, pharmacists from around the world joined an insight board hosted by FIP for a discussion on global pharmacy trends and their impact on public health and self-care across different countries.

The experts at the insight board addressed the following primary questions:

1. What are the main factors influencing current trends in pharmacy across different countries, particularly post-COVID-19?
2. What barriers exist that might hinder the spread or effectiveness of these trends?
3. How have these trends changed the role of pharmacies in the healthcare system across different countries?

This report summarises the discussion and highlights the key insights shared. It explores current global pharmacy trends and their influence on self-care practices and related industries. The findings will lead to actionable recommendations that will inform future policies and practices within the pharmacy profession and some clear next steps for FIP and our membership.

2 Insight board participants

Chair	
Catherine Duggan	FIP Chief Executive Officer

FIP staff	
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Susan James	Director of Quality, Ontario College of Pharmacists; Chair, FIP Pharmacy Technician Advisory Group	Canada
Eric Janson	CEO, The Royal Dutch Pharmacists Association (KNMP)	Netherlands
Stephen Jenkinson	Head of Innovation, Member of the Executive Board, pharmaSuisse	Switzerland
Harpreet Kaur	Executive Director, Malaysian Pharmacists Society	Malaysia
Mark Koziol	Chairman, Pharmacists' Defence Association	UK
Jack Shen Lim	General Secretary, Malaysian Pharmacists Society	Malaysia
Carolina Martinez Berganza	Director of International Affairs, General Pharmaceutical Council of Spain	Spain
Shushu Mhangwane	Treasurer, Independent Community Pharmacy Association (ICPA)	South Africa
Tom Murray	President, Irish Pharmacy Union	Ireland
Aris Prins	President, Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union (PGEU) Chair, The Royal Dutch Pharmacists Association (KNMP)	Netherlands
Jorge Anibal Schlottke	Member, The Argentinian Pharmaceutical Confederation (COFA); Executive member, FIP Community Pharmacy Section	Argentina

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Josephine Fubara	Chief Science Officer, Opella
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3 Snapshot of current global trends in pharmacy-led self-care

The insight board participants highlighted key pharmacy trends in relation to self-care that have been observed in their countries in recent years, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Identifying these trends is crucial for understanding how pharmacies and pharmacists have adapted to meet evolving healthcare needs and for guiding future developments in pharmacy practice as well as in associated industries. Recognising these changes as well as what main factors influence them enables stakeholders to strengthen the profession's role in public health and improve patient outcomes in a rapidly changing healthcare environment. Below are three of the main trends identified.

3.1 Post-COVID-19 expansion of pharmacists' roles and public trust

Participants emphasised both the evolving responsibilities of pharmacists and the heightened public confidence in pharmacist expertise post-COVID-19. One of the trends identified at the insight board is the evident increase in the public's trust in pharmacists and the growing awareness of the vital role they play in healthcare, and the increased visibility of the pharmacist's role. Pharmacists, particularly community pharmacists, are among the most accessible healthcare providers, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacies often stood as the sole healthcare facilities available to many communities. The accessibility of pharmacists not only allowed them to continue providing essential services but also positioned them as trusted sources of information during a time of uncertainty.

> *"Pharmacies remained open while many other healthcare professionals were otherwise engaged... COVID-19 pandemic helped reinforce the perception of pharmacists as trustworthy healthcare professionals, a recognition that the public also shared."*

Community pharmacies serve as a central health resource, with roles that have expanded to include participation in health literacy initiatives, particularly combatting vaccine hesitancy, vaccination campaigns, and point-of-care testing, among a range of essential services. As a result, the trust that communities place in their local pharmacists and the awareness of their essential contributions to healthcare have become increasingly evident.

> *"Pharmacists have proven to be effective vaccinators and educators, even visiting patients at home during lockdowns to personalise medication and provide counselling, which boosted public confidence in their role."*

This shift highlighted the significant potential that pharmacists have when they are fully integrated into healthcare systems, demonstrating their ability to contribute more broadly to public health when their role is properly recognised and supported.

> *"The community has become more aware of the services we provide as a pharmacy, taking charge of their health and becoming more proactive about preventative measures. As a result, there is increased trust in us [pharmacists] as healthcare providers."*

In some countries, pharmacists are also gaining recognition from other healthcare professionals, including pharmaceutical companies, and have been involved in efforts to advance self-care.

> *"In Malaysia, we've observed that pharmaceutical companies are increasingly turning to community pharmacies to champion self-care initiatives through community education. For instance, we recently conducted a successful programme on pre-diabetes self-care and plan to expand this initiative in collaboration with the company involved."*

3.2 The rise of digitalisation

Digitalisation has significantly impacted self-care as a global trend in various ways, influencing how individuals manage their health and wellness. Digital health tools such as telemedicine platforms (including telepharmacy), e-prescriptions, wearable devices and health applications have transformed healthcare delivery, making it more accessible, efficient and engaging.

For pharmacists, digitalisation facilitates many of the pharmacy services they provide, such as virtual consultations and automated dispensing, whilst also allowing for easy access to patient information and health records. Digital platforms have been particularly beneficial for individuals, enhancing health literacy and self-care levels by providing easier access to health information. For instance, digital tools enable individuals to seek guidance on culturally sensitive topics, such as women's health issues and contraception. One speaker noted:

> *"As a Muslim-majority country, Malaysia has social taboos surrounding certain aspects of self-care, such as contraception and women's health issues. Engaging with a male pharmacist about these topics can be challenging for women. Interestingly, during COVID-19, the ability for women to consult pharmacists increased due to digital platforms, allowing them to access information more comfortably."*

This shift has also transformed patient behaviour, as evidence suggests that people often consult multiple sources before seeking help from healthcare providers. It is well understood that the average patient would typically have multiple connections—such as discussions with family, friends, or online resources—before consulting a pharmacist or healthcare professional. Today, with the widespread use of AI and digital tools, this number has likely increased. Patients now frequently walk into pharmacies with their self-diagnoses, often presenting rashes or other symptoms on their phones, stating, *"This is what I have; just give me what I need."* This change in behaviour poses challenges for pharmacists, as it diminishes their ability to offer professional advice and maintain their role as primary care providers, instead being treated as mere dispensers of medication.

The overwhelming amount of online health information, often from unreliable sources, has led to widespread misinformation, complicating pharmacists' efforts to provide accurate advice. This has also encouraged patients to self-diagnose, often leading to incorrect conclusions.

> *"There is a significant issue with the spread of incorrect self-care advice. "Doctor Google" is prevalent, leading people to rely on unverified remedies from family and friends rather than professional medical guidance."*

Moreover, the rapid growth of e-commerce in health products and medications raises concerns about the safety, quality, and misuse of items purchased without professional guidance, oversight, or proper regulation. As the digital landscape expands, pharmacists play a crucial role in guiding patients to the right use of digital tools, ensuring that technology and online health products are utilised safely and responsibly to improve overall healthcare outcomes. A speaker reflected on the changing landscape, stating:

> *"In the past, every community had a core pharmacy that residents relied upon. However, over the last decade, large chains have acquired many of these local pharmacies, leading to closures and a shift to mail-order services. As a result, the trusted local pharmacist that the community depended on is no longer available."*

Similarly, in Latin America:

> *"The unregulated e-commerce market for over the counter (OTC) drugs and other potentially risky medicines poses a threat to public health. Consumers are purchasing these products without professional advice or oversight, putting their communities at risk."*

This multifaceted digital evolution emphasises the need for pharmacists to adapt to the changing landscape, ensuring they remain pivotal in promoting safe and effective self-care practices amid the challenges posed by digital misinformation and the unregulated e-commerce environment.

3.3 Healthcare workforce shortages

One of the major trends emerging following the pandemic is a noticeable shortage of healthcare staff, including pharmacists, which has placed immense pressure on healthcare systems worldwide. This workforce shortage impacts the delivery of essential services, from routine care to critical functions such as vaccination and medication management. The shortages have led to increased workloads, resulting in burnout, longer patient waiting times, and a strain on pharmacists' capacity to provide comprehensive consultations and care. As one speaker highlighted:

"A recent survey revealed that 30% of pharmacists are considering leaving the profession, with 90% citing burnout as the main reason. Increasing administrative burdens and pressure to do more with limited resources are significant contributing factors."

Shifting roles and responsibilities

The healthcare staff shortage has driven a shift in responsibilities. Many tasks historically handled by doctors are being delegated to other healthcare professionals, including pharmacists. *"The issue of doctor shortages is moving roles down to those historically below doctors, retaining old roles while gaining new responsibilities,"* illustrating the increasing demand on pharmacists to take on expanded roles. This shift, while necessary, has led to role ambiguity and a lack of sufficient training and support to handle these new responsibilities.

Uncoordinated efforts in expanding scope of practice

In many regions, governments have responded by broadening the scope of pharmacy practice to mitigate the impact of physician shortages, allowing pharmacists to take on expanded roles in patient care, such as administering vaccines and providing point-of-care testing. However, as noted:

"The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed workforce shortages in Canada, particularly among physicians, leading to a push for expanding pharmacists' roles. In response, governments are broadening the scope of pharmacy practice. However, this effort lacks significant coordination across the country."

Without cohesive national strategies, these expanded roles can overburden pharmacists, diminishing the quality of care.

Declining enrolment in pharmacy schools

The shortage of healthcare professionals is compounded by declining enrolment in pharmacy schools and other healthcare training programmes. This decline threatens the future sustainability of the pharmacy workforce, particularly in the context of growing demand for self-care and expanded pharmacy services.

"We are also concerned about the declining enrolment in pharmacy schools and other healthcare professional programmes across the country (USA), complicating the healthcare landscape, particularly in relation to self-care."

Addressing these shortages will require a multi-faceted approach, including investment in pharmacy education, improved working conditions, and sustainable workforce strategies to support the evolving demands on healthcare systems.

4 Factors influencing pharmacy trends on self-care

During the insight board, participants discussed key global trends and influencing factors that are shaping the evolution of pharmacy practice and self-care worldwide. These discussions highlighted both drivers of positive change and barriers that create challenges for the profession. Among the global trends explored (as shared in the previous section) were the rise of digitalisation, the growing recognition of pharmacists as essential healthcare providers, and shifting patient behaviours toward greater self-care. However, participants also identified factors such as healthcare access inequities, regulatory hurdles, workforce shortages, and declining enrolment in healthcare programmes, including pharmacy, as significant challenges that need to be addressed.

These influencing factors impact the ability of pharmacists to expand their roles, improve patient outcomes, and meet the increasing demand for self-care services. While drivers push the profession forward, enhancing care delivery and accessibility, barriers—such as regulatory constraints and limited resources—can slow down progress and negatively affect public health outcomes.

Understanding the interplay between these global trends and influencing factors is essential for shaping the future of pharmacy. By addressing the challenges and leveraging opportunities, stakeholders—pharmacists, policymakers, educators, and healthcare providers—can help ensure that pharmacy continues to evolve and adapt. In this section, we will explore the key influencing factors discussed at the insight board, examining how they are shaping the future of self-care and pharmacy practice globally.

4.1 Equity in access to healthcare

Equitable access to healthcare is a crucial enabler for achieving better health outcomes and fostering effective self-care practices within communities. When individuals, regardless of their socio-economic status or geographic location, have equal access to healthcare services, resources, and education, they are better equipped to manage their health proactively. Access to healthcare empowers individuals to engage in preventive measures, improves health literacy, and allows communities to take ownership of their well-being through informed self-care practices. However, disparities between urban and rural areas pose significant challenges to achieving this equity.

"Access to care may be relatively easy but obtaining quality care is a major issue."

In urban settings, healthcare services, including pharmacies, are more readily available, providing quicker and more comprehensive access to care. On the other hand, rural areas often face severe shortages in healthcare infrastructure, with some communities having no pharmacies for hundreds of kilometres. This disparity in access creates a significant gap in the ability of rural populations to engage in self-care and preventive health measures. As one participant pointed out:

"There is a vast disparity in our population between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots,' particularly regarding access to healthcare. The private sector is quite privileged, and access to healthcare through pharmacies or other means is generally good. However, in the public sector, especially in rural areas, access is severely limited."

Digital tools offer a potential solution to this challenge. Telepharmacy, telemedicine, and mobile health applications can improve access to healthcare services in remote areas by providing virtual consultations and health education to individuals who otherwise lack access to physical healthcare facilities. These tools can help reduce the disparity in care by making services more accessible, as noted in the discussion:

"A key factor influencing current pharmacy trends post-COVID-19 is the public's demand for quick and accessible care, alongside the government's need to reduce congestion in emergency departments."

Despite this progress, challenges remain, such as the availability of internet or Wi-Fi in rural areas, which can limit the effectiveness of digital health solutions: *"In many places, there are no pharmacies for hundreds of kilometres, and often there is no internet or Wi-Fi, which presents huge challenges."*

As healthcare systems move toward more integrated national models, like the proposed National Health Insurance systems in some regions, addressing these urban versus rural disparities and investing in digital tools will be essential for achieving true equity in healthcare access. By closing the gap between urban and rural populations, healthcare systems can ensure that all individuals are empowered and equipped with the knowledge and resources to maintain healthier lifestyles through self-care.

4.2 Pharmacy education and training

To improve self-care practices among patients and communities, it is important that pharmacists are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to empower individuals in adopting effective preventative and self-care measures. Pharmacy education and training play a pivotal role in in preparing pharmacists for these expanding roles. Modern pharmacy curricula must integrate comprehensive training in patient counselling, health promotion, and preventive care, which will enable pharmacists to confidently take on more proactive roles in supporting patient self-care and improving health literacy.

However, there remain gaps in training, particularly in relation to new technologies such as digital health tools and telepharmacy, which are becoming increasingly important in healthcare delivery. As healthcare continues to evolve with advancements in technology, pharmacists must be supported and prepared to effectively guide patients in navigating these tools to enhance self-care practices. For instance:

"Many pharmacists in Switzerland are not prepared or willing to take on the responsibilities they have been given. The Swiss Pharmacists Association is working to empower pharmacists and is training new pharmacists at the university level to be prepared to take on these responsibilities."

Continuous professional development is equally important for practicing pharmacists to stay up to date with rapidly changing healthcare trends and emerging technologies. CPD initiatives that focus on self-care practices, digital health and interprofessional collaboration will ensure that pharmacists are well-equipped to meet the evolving needs of patients.

"We are developing a virtual pharmacy programme to train pharmacists in patient counselling, which is crucial for building trust and personalising medicine."

In some countries, like India, significant gaps in self-care education for pharmacists still exist, particularly in addressing health literacy and promoting preventive care. As noted, *"to improve health literacy, it is essential to enhance education policies, provide ongoing training, and strengthen laws governing pharmacy practices."* By taking a multi-faceted approach that includes ongoing education and robust training, pharmacists will be empowered to take on more active roles in improving public health and supporting patients in making informed healthcare decisions.

Ultimately, strengthening pharmacy education at undergraduate levels and CPD programmes with a focus on self-care and digital health will enable pharmacists to provide more comprehensive care, enhancing their contributions to public health and further promoting self-care practices among communities.

4.3 Regulation of pharmacy-based services

Pharmacy regulations and health policies often vary significantly between nations and across regions, leading to global variations in how pharmacy services are delivered and perceived. These variations can limit pharmacists' ability to fully engage in self-care initiatives, as outdated or unclear regulations may restrict their scope of practice, leaving them uncertain about the services they are authorised to provide. For example, in Switzerland:

> *"The Swiss Federal Council wants to give more responsibility to pharmacists, but the current regulations have not yet been updated to reflect this. These outdated regulations hinder pharmacists from fully acting on the expanded scope of practice."*

Additionally, regulations in some regions may restrict collaboration with other healthcare providers, often leading to professional competition rather than cooperation. This creates a barrier to integrating pharmacists more fully into patient care teams. In Jordan, for instance:

> *"There are still significant barriers. Regulations are quite stringent, and the relationship with other healthcare providers often feels competitive rather than complementary."*

Similarly, in the four nations of the UK, changes that have broadened pharmacists' responsibilities, such as prescribing authority, but where policies differ across the nations, have also led to confusion about roles within the healthcare team. As noted:

> *"While these changes are important and useful, they create chaos as competing ambitions mean patients don't know who they'll see at the doctor's or pharmacy. Professions struggle to understand how pharmacists, technicians, and GPs should interact."*

Furthermore, regulatory differences across countries can either hinder or promote pharmacists' roles in self-care. In Argentina, recent deregulation aimed at reducing medicine prices sparked concerns about the diminishing role of pharmacists in dispensing medications.

> *"One of the first decisions was to deregulate the economy, including extensive changes to the pharmacy sector with over 100 pages of new rules. The aim was to reduce medicine prices and question the necessity of pharmacists dispensing them, which was alarming for many advocates of pharmaceutical services."*

Similarly, strict rules in some nations, such as non-remunerated prescription-only drugs, create additional barriers for pharmacies to serve the public effectively.

> *"If the law is not changed to allow for non-remunerated prescription-only medication to be dispensed by pharmacies, people will turn to drugstores. This is because they will have to pay a prescription fee for a non-remunerated drug, which can be avoided at drugstores. This is a very restrictive situation, and it is important to address it."*

To better support pharmacists in their growing roles, particularly in self-care delivery, regulatory innovations are necessary. Clear, updated, and supportive regulatory frameworks should empower pharmacists to operate at the top of their scope of practice, allowing them to collaborate more effectively with other healthcare professionals and take an active role in improving patient outcomes. Such regulations would enable pharmacists to contribute meaningfully to public health efforts, especially in promoting health literacy and self-care within communities.

4.4 Reimbursement of pharmacists for self-care and health literacy services

In addition to strong pharmacy education reforms and improved regulations, reimbursing pharmacists for the full range of services they provide, including patient education, is essential for boosting self-care levels and strengthening public trust in their expertise. Funding models for pharmacy-based services must evolve to compensate pharmacists not just for dispensing medications but also for their wide range of services, such as health screenings, medication management, and patient education. By adequately reimbursing these activities, pharmacists can be fully integrated into self-care initiatives, emphasising their pivotal role in improving patient outcomes and enhancing public trust in their expertise. As highlighted in discussions:

> *"If pharmacists are engaged in patient care continuously, we must also rethink remuneration systems to incentivise this shift. Currently, if a pharmacist focuses on patient care, they may lose the dispensing fee, which is counterproductive."*

One of the key challenges in remunerating pharmacists for non-dispensing services lies in the current funding structures, where compensation is often directed toward pharmacies rather than individual pharmacists.

> *"The funding primarily goes to pharmacies, rather than to individual pharmacists. This is a concern for us, and we are actively exploring a new funding model."*

Such models create a tension between business priorities and patient care, as pharmacists may not be motivated to engage in essential non-dispensing services like patient education if it reduces their income. Furthermore, pharmacies that operate primarily as retail businesses may not prioritise these patient-centred services, limiting the potential impact of pharmacists in promoting self-care and health literacy.

To address these issues, effective reimbursement models should be developed that align with the expanding role of pharmacists in patient care. Compensating pharmacists for providing self-care-related services would reinforce their value within the healthcare system and motivate them to further engage in these critical activities. As noted:

> *"Additionally, we want to address the perception of pharmacists as healthcare providers rather than merely employees of a retail corporation."*

By shifting the focus from product-based remuneration to service-based reimbursement, both pharmacists and patients will benefit, resulting in stronger public trust, better patient outcomes, and a more effective healthcare system overall.

4.5 Transitioning from profession-centred to patient-centred care

The transition from a profession-centred to a patient-centred approach in healthcare is a crucial factor which was discussed at the insight board. By prioritising the health needs of patients, healthcare providers, including pharmacists, can tailor interventions and support to meet the needs of each individual. This shift not only enhances patient engagement and adherence to treatment plans but also empowers patients to take an active role in managing their health. A patient-centred approach encourages collaboration among healthcare teams, ensuring that all professionals work together to provide quality healthcare and improve health outcomes.

However, several participants expressed concerns about the current trend toward a profession-centred model, where the interests of the profession often overshadow patient needs. For instance, in the United States:

> *"We often claim to have a patient-centred focus on healthcare; however, the reality is that we have a profession-centred distribution of care. This discrepancy complicates the situation as the*

delivery of care tends to prioritise providers (the professions) rather than recipients (the patients)."

This shift is further compounded by the pressure exerted by large corporations on performance metrics, which frequently prioritise business interests over patient care. As one participant noted,

"One of our biggest concerns is the pressure exerted by large corporations on performance metrics, which often prioritises business interests over patient care. This ongoing struggle has led to pharmacists not being recognised as healthcare professionals."

Building strong pharmacist-patient relationships is essential for implementing a patient-centred model effectively. Pharmacists must engage with patients beyond merely dispensing medications to establish trust and encourage open communication about health concerns. However, there exists a reluctance among some pharmacists to adopt this model, often stemming from the rigid frameworks imposed by corporate practices. In Canada for example:

"In Ontario, pharmacists are currently facing a lack of professional autonomy due to metrics that restrict their ability to make independent decisions and follow best practices in patient care."

This lack of autonomy can hinder the development of meaningful patient relationships, which are vital for effective self-care.

Moreover, the increasing allowance for direct advertisement and promotion of prescription medicines to patients poses additional challenges. The context for this was from a colleague sharing learnings from the US where prescription medicines are actively promoted. As highlighted,

"It is nearly impossible to watch television or consume media without encountering advertisements for various drugs, including those for chemotherapy. I believe that healthcare decisions, especially regarding chemotherapy, should not be driven by marketing."

This potential risk could undermine professional guidance and may contribute to self-medication without proper oversight, further complicating the pharmacist's ability to provide patient-centred care. Having the pharmacist involved is hugely important.

In the Netherlands, a reliance on prescription-only medications has led to a proliferation of drugstores that dilute the potential of self-care initiatives. As noted,

"We have viewed it solely as a market and have neglected its potential, which has led to the current situation. It is crucial to make self-care a strategic priority."

Addressing these challenges will require cultural shifts within the pharmacy profession, including a focus on building pharmacist-patient relationships and overcoming workforce reluctance to adopt patient-centred care models.

4.6 Medicine supply challenges

One of the key factors impacting current pharmacy trends and presenting significant barriers is the persistent shortage of essential medicines in some countries. Participants at the insight board highlighted that this shortage not only limits access to crucial medications but also impacts patient trust in pharmacy services and undermines the perception of pharmacies as reliable healthcare providers. This situation ultimately hinders efforts to foster self-care and health literacy within communities. In addition, global supply chain disruptions have intensified these challenges, leading to a greater reliance on alternative treatments that may not be effective or safe.

Pharmacists find themselves increasingly burdened by these shortages. As one participant noted:

"If pharmacists are dedicating all their time to patient care, perhaps someone else should handle the complexities of why medications are unavailable."

Surveys conducted by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) in the UK indicate that pharmacists spend as much as two and a half days a week just trying to source medications that are in short supply. This diversion of time and resources is not beneficial for anyone involved and detracts from the pharmacist's ability to engage effectively in patient care. Therefore, a comprehensive review of the entire process is essential.

Additionally, the ongoing shortage of medicines complicates self-care practices:

"An educated public is essential, but the ongoing shortage of medicines complicates self-care, forcing patients to visit pharmacies for their medications. When shortages occur, most medicines are allocated to public hospitals, which negatively impacts community pharmacies and undermines the progress made in promoting self-care."

This allocation process creates a critical gap in access, as community pharmacies struggle to maintain adequate supplies for their patients. Furthermore, the resulting security issues lead to stockpiling, which exacerbates the problem and creates an environment of uncertainty for both patients and pharmacists.

4.7 Health literacy and cultural influences

Health literacy and cultural influences play a crucial role in shaping an individual's ability to manage their health effectively. Participants at the insight board noted that while general literacy rates may be improving, health literacy remains significantly low in many communities, leading to challenges in self-care practices. This gap in understanding is particularly problematic, as low health literacy can hinder individuals from effectively utilising available healthcare resources and engaging in preventive measures.

Cultural beliefs and practices can further complicate this landscape. For instance, reliance on traditional remedies or advice from family members often supersedes professional medical guidance in some countries. As a result, many individuals may engage in inappropriate self-medication and make misinformed health decisions. One participant highlighted the issue in India:

"In India, with a population of approximately 1.4 billion and around 800,000 pharmacies, the situation regarding health literacy is concerning. While general literacy has improved, health literacy remains very low, and medicinal literacy is almost non-existent. This gap creates significant challenges for individuals seeking appropriate healthcare."

Cultural barriers also affect access to self-care, particularly regarding sensitive topics such as women's health. The presence of societal taboos can deter individuals from seeking professional advice or discussing their health concerns openly, further exacerbating the issues related to health literacy:

"There are numerous prescribers in society—neighbours, family, and friends—who often provide medical advice. This leads to a situation where many people receive prescription medications over the counter, despite existing laws intended to regulate this practice."

Pharmacists have a vital role in bridging these gaps in health literacy by offering culturally sensitive and appropriate health education and support. By empowering patients to make informed choices regarding their health and well-being, pharmacists can help navigate the complexities of cultural beliefs while promoting effective self-care practices. As one participant stated:

"Pharmacists can indeed play a crucial role in guiding patients through the maze of information and confusion. Patients often face overwhelming amounts of advice, and they might receive inaccurate information that leads them to believe they have a much more serious condition than they do."

5 Key recommendations

Participants at the insight board suggested and discussed some key recommendations aimed at advancing positive trends in pharmacy while mitigating or reversing negative ones, particularly in the realm of self-care. These recommendations can support the growth of pharmacists' roles, enhance patient outcomes, and promote sustainable self-care practices within healthcare by addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities.

These recommendations include:

1. **Enhancing health literacy through pharmacists**

   - Pharmacists should lead public education initiatives to improve health literacy within communities. This includes developing targeted self-care programmes tailored to different patient populations to empower individuals to manage their health proactively.
   - Pharmacists and policymakers should prioritise self-care within their strategic agendas, placing a particular emphasis on the pharmacist's pivotal role in promoting and enhancing self-care practices. By prioritising self-care in their strategic agendas, pharmacists can become key enablers of preventive health, assisting patients in managing minor ailments, use of OTC medications, and adopting healthier lifestyle choices.

2. **Education and training for promotion of self-care**

   - Pharmacy education and training are essential for preparing pharmacists to promote self-care effectively. Pharmacy curricula should equip future pharmacists with the knowledge and practical skills to guide patients in responsible self-medication, disease prevention, and health maintenance.
   - Continuous professional development (CPD) is also crucial for current pharmacists to stay updated on evolving healthcare trends and technologies. By enhancing education, the pharmacy profession can elevate its contribution to public health and self-care practices.

3. **Regulatory and policy reforms**

   - Addressing barriers in pharmacy regulations is vital for supporting expanded roles for pharmacists in self-care. Policymakers should establish clear, comprehensive regulatory guidelines that empower pharmacists to take active roles in promoting self-care.
   - Revisiting remuneration models to ensure pharmacists are fairly compensated for the full range of services they provide, such as patient education and health screenings.
   - Recommendations for policy updates should aim to create supportive environments that recognise pharmacists as integral healthcare providers.

4. **Enhancing interprofessional collaboration**

   - Improving self-care practices requires enhanced collaboration among all healthcare providers. By fostering effective communication and cooperation among pharmacists, physicians, nurses, pharmacy technicians, and other healthcare professionals, a more integrated approach to patient care can be established. This teamwork enables the sharing of knowledge and expertise, allowing healthcare providers to develop comprehensive self-care strategies tailored to individual patient needs.

5. **Digitalisation in self-care**

- The digitalisation of healthcare and then self-care, be carefully monitored and regulated to prevent patients from accessing medications without prior consultation with a healthcare provider, particularly through online applications or e-commerce platforms.
- Encouraging the integration of digital tools into pharmacy services can enhance patient care, but it is essential to promote safe digital health practices to combat misinformation. Pharmacists play a vital role in providing education and guidance on safe medicine use in the context of digital health.

6. **Collaboration with industry partners**

- Fostering partnerships between pharmacies and the pharmaceutical industry is essential to support self-care initiatives. This includes encouraging the regulation of e-commerce in the pharmaceutical sector to ensure safe practices and prevent unauthorised access to medications.
- Pharmaceutical companies and organisations like the Global Self-Care Federation are actively supporting pharmacy-led self-care initiatives.
- Industry stakeholders are critical in supporting the management and solving global medication shortages, which impact self-care initiatives. There is a call for more co-ordinated efforts from industries to mitigate these shortages.
- As a global organisation representing pharmacists in all sectors, FIP can continue to develop guidance and tools that empower pharmacists to engage confidently in self-care initiatives.
- Additionally, FIP should create a policy paper addressing the impact of medicine shortages on pharmacy practice, outlining challenges and proposing solutions to ensure pharmacists can continue to provide optimal care.

Key recommendations for enhancing self-care

6 Conclusions

In conclusion, the evolving landscape of pharmacy practice is shaped by several key trends that emerged particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic globally. Expanded roles of pharmacists in areas such as administering vaccinations, conducting health checks, and promoting health literacy during the pandemic has been crucial in alleviating the pressures faced by healthcare systems which are often struggling with rising costs and diminishing budgets. In return, this has increased public trust and awareness of pharmacists' roles and positioned pharmacists as vital contributors to primary healthcare.

The rise of digitalisation has also transformed the practices of pharmacy, enabling pharmacists to leverage technology to provide better care and enhancing patient access to information and self-care resources. However, challenges such as healthcare workforce shortages, which the World Health Organization projects in the coming years, and rising costs have also emerged. These challenges underscore the urgent need for pharmacists to take on expanded responsibilities in patient care, especially with regards to improving self-care levels in communities.

To fully understand the potential impact of these trends, several influencing factors must be addressed. Achieving equity in access to healthcare is essential, ensuring that all communities can benefit from the knowledge and expertise of pharmacists. Enhancing pharmacy education and training can also empower pharmacists to meet the evolving demands of healthcare delivery effectively and to provide guidance on self-care more confidently. Moreover, establishing clear regulations for pharmacy-based services and implementing fair reimbursement models for pharmacists' self-care and health literacy efforts are critical for fostering their engagement in improving public health.

Transitioning from a profession-centred to a patient-centred care model is essential to ensure that patients are the main priority, that their needs are met and that strategies set are tailored to address those needs. Addressing challenges with supply and shortages of medicines and improved health literacy within communities will further support these efforts, enabling pharmacists to play a pivotal role in promoting informed self-care practices.

Prioritising these strategies and fostering collaboration among policymakers, healthcare professionals, and the pharmacy community not only enhances the role of pharmacists within healthcare systems but also improves health outcomes for individuals and communities. Ultimately, this holistic approach will contribute to a more resilient and sustainable healthcare framework, better equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

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