

The role of community pharmacies in today's Europe

A call to action by Farmácia Latina

At a time when an ageing population, as well as cost-containment and budget control measures, are increasingly putting a strain on the effectiveness and quality of European healthcare systems, **community pharmacists play a crucial role as an extended frontline within primary healthcare networks across Europe**, providing added value to citizens, society, health systems, and the economy as a whole.

Community pharmacists have a unique responsibility for the health and wellbeing of European citizens as we are often the **first and last point of the patients' interaction with national health systems**. By offering widely distributed physical access, highly skilled healthcare professionals, easy and burden free assistance, together with a familiar environment, community pharmacies play a key part in **ensuring that healthcare is both accessible and patient centred**.

Beyond the traditional role of ensuring timely accessibility of medicines to the population, community pharmacists are nowadays **providing an increasing number of added-value healthcare services**. The network of 160,000 community pharmacies in Europe presents a unique opportunity to provide **improved access to health screening, early interventions and disease prevention programmes for all citizens**.¹

As an example, the scope of community pharmacist functions has widened in recent years to include **vaccination/immunization** in a number of countries, notably in Portugal, Ireland, the UK, Denmark, Switzerland and France (currently in pilot phase), leading to an increase in the percentage of the population covered by the flu vaccine as a result and consequently high levels of patients' satisfaction. Community pharmacies provide the ideal conditions to conduct screenings, ensuring access and proximity to people who may otherwise not regularly visit other healthcare facilities. Nowadays, a number of countries run **screening programmes** for type 2 diabetes through community pharmacies. An example of this is the joint effort by Italian pharmacy owners' association (Federfarma) in collaboration with partners including Italian Chamber of Pharmacists (FOFI), Cross-Party Parliamentary Group on Diabetes and Italian Society of Diabetologists (SID), organised a diabetes screening campaign during International Diabetes Week in 2017.

Another example is the rapid HIV screening programme, which was launched in Barcelona, Spain and later extended to different Spanish Autonomous Communities, to identify possible infections earlier, refer to diagnose and prevent onward infections. Portugal recently joined Spain in this initiative by having the government officially authorising community pharmacies to perform rapid tests for the detection of HIV and viral hepatitis (HepB and HepC).

Health-related problems such as minor ailments that are dealt within the competencies of pharmacies would otherwise put an extra burden on primary health services and physicians. Hence, formal **primary care settings are able to focus their efforts on the most complex cases**, improving the efficiency of healthcare services and facilitating access. More generally, collaborative models of public health intervention services between pharmacies and primary healthcare centres can allow for the establishment of inter-professional collaboration in pre-agreed therapeutic areas and agreed intervention protocols. Portugal is an example of a country where these collaborative models work, in the pilot-project USFARMÁCIA general practitioners and pharmacists are able to exchange therapeutic information and coordinate for efficient healthcare provision.

We believe that in order to fully benefit from their prescribed treatments, **patients need to be and feel empowered through information and education**; understanding why their treatment is needed and how to take

¹ PGEU(2016), The Community Pharmacy Contribution <http://www.pgeu.eu/en/press/233:state-of-health-in-the-eu-the-community-pharmacy-contribution.html>

it. Indeed, non-adherence is estimated to cost the European Union €125 billion annually. Various studies demonstrate that pharmacists' regular interaction with patients has the potential to **improve adherence, reduce adverse effects of medicines use, lead to better outcomes and contribute to a cost-effective health system.**

France, Italy and Spain have all launched pilot initiatives to support patient adherence and medicines use. Through targeted consultations with asthma patients, Italian pharmacists contribute to improving clinical outcomes and cost-effectiveness of prescribed medicines, reducing medicines waste and improving patient outcomes by improving adherence. France has also launched a medication review programme to support 3,9 million elderly patients with multiple chronic conditions, following on from existing programmes supporting asthma and thrombosis patients. In Spain, project ADHIERETE supports adherence in patients aged 60 or above with chronic conditions.

In addition, community pharmacists are strongly committed to digital transformation. In Spain, Portugal and Italy, a firm commitment has been made to increase the use of the electronic prescriptions in the National Health System helping to improve patient safety and the sustainability of the wider health system. In France, community pharmacists maintain patient medication records (Dossier Pharmaceutique), which display all treatments (prescribed or over-the-counter), dispensed to a patient during the previous four months, regardless of the pharmacy in which they were delivered.

Our call to action

We thus call on the relevant public authorities, and all healthcare stakeholders to:

- ✓ Promote the increasingly wide range of services available in community pharmacies through **public awareness campaigns** and in **national health strategies**. In this regard, we call upon the authorities to:
 - Recognise the role community pharmacies play in improving access to **disease prevention and health promotion programmes**;
 - Embrace the added-value pharmacies provide by **improving access to screening services**;
 - Recognise the enduring role of pharmacists in the area of **self-care and health literacy**;
 - Acknowledge the growing scope of practice of community pharmacists in the area of **vaccinations and other services**.
- ✓ Support services that aim to improve **patients' adherence to medicines**, developing programmes that will support pharmacists' capacity to communicate with patients, and helping to ensure the sustainability of national health systems. Other professional services that need to be developed include medication review with follow up and reconciliation of medications at the time of the hospital discharge;
- ✓ Promote and support **technological projects** encouraged by national professional organisations as a ladder for the development of innovative professional services developed by pharmacies, providing better pharmaceutical assistance to citizens and improving the efficiency of national health systems;
- ✓ Fully involve community pharmacies in **national health strategies**, recognising the crucial role they play in the lives of patients;
- ✓ Promote **strategic alliances** between pharmacies, patients and scientific associations, as well as dialogue with the pharmaceutical industry, and universities, recognising potential synergies in the work that we do;
- ✓ Ensure the **long-term financial viability of healthcare** systems by recognising the cost-effectiveness of pharmacy interventions.

