



# VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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## Beyond Your Pill Bottle: An Essential Prescription for Better Health

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Dr. Michelle R. Easton, Dean, University of Charleston School of Pharmacy, is a native of New Orleans, Louisiana. She received both Bachelor of Science and Doctor of Pharmacy degrees from Xavier University of Louisiana. She completed a specialty residency, in psychiatric pharmacy practice, at the Medical University of South Carolina teaching hospitals, and the Management Development Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Dr. Easton served as Director of Experiential Education at Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia before joining the University of Charleston (UC). An inaugural member of the leadership team for the development of the UC School of Pharmacy, she served as Assistant Dean for Professional and Student Affairs for three years and was named Interim Dean and Dean of the School of Pharmacy in fall 2008 and spring 2009, respectively. Dr. Easton was an inaugural recipient of UC's University Fellow distinction for outstanding service and contribution.

She is a member of several national pharmacy organizations and serves on the National Pharmaceutical Association Foundation board, and was appointed to both the Virginia Board of Pharmacy and Virginia Board of Health Professions.

The heart, soul and roots of the pharmacy profession are deeply embedded in the science of medicine and healing. The art of promoting health, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease are closely intertwined, and are an important area of focus of the human condition.

The mainstay of therapy to reduce, manage and/or eradicate disease are medications, drugs and substances that have evolved to very complex regimens that can be difficult to adhere to. Although it is hard to keep up with the exploding number of medicinal agents available by prescription and/or over-the-counter, there are uniquely skilled individuals who are highly trained at the doctoral level (PharmD, or Doctor of Pharmacy) for six years (two years of undergraduate instruction and four years in pharmacy school) to become medication experts. You are familiar with these individuals, as they are typically found in every city or town – they're your pharmacists.

As health care providers, pharmacists are easily accessible and generally do not require an appointment to receive their services. Typically, the first health care provider sought for consultation regarding over-the-counter (OTC) medications, a prescription medication or to learn more about a medication seen in an advertisement is a local pharmacist.

By and large, the public knows of the pharmacist's role in dispensing medication in hospitals and in local retail pharmacies, where they fill orders for customers' doctor-prescribed medications. While the local pharmacist is efficient in the distribution of prescription and OTC medications, there are many unmet health care needs that the pharmacist is uniquely trained and positioned to provide. As a result,



the roles and responsibilities of pharmacists have expanded over time, and the continuing evolution is exciting and in progress.

Some of the most exciting areas of expansion for pharmacists are in public health, pharmacogenomics (personalized medicine), medication safety and adherence, population health, and substance abuse (e.g., reduction of prescription opioid abuse, naloxone training and education). While additional articles could be written about the ability of pharmacists to meet several unmet medical needs that improve patient health, offer convenience to patients and decrease health care costs, the focus on the remainder of this article will briefly address pharmacists' role in public health, medication therapy management (MTM) and population health.

### Public Health

The utilization of pharmacists' involvement in public health activities has increased over the years and had a significantly positive impact. For example, within the last 20-plus years, in response to the challenge of infectious disease, pharmacists have increased the health security of our society through the administration of vaccinations. Prior to the 21st century, a pharmacist's primary involvement in immunization efforts consisted of the acquisition, storage and distribution of, and education about, vaccines to laypersons and physicians.



*The University of Charleston School of Pharmacy offers students a dynamic and rigorous curriculum that prepares them to practice in today's health care environment*



*Student pharmacists participate in delivering pharmacy services to real patients just steps away from their academic classroom and labs*

Initiated in the mid-1990s, pharmacists, primarily in the northwest area of the United States, began administering influenza vaccines under collaborative practice agreements (CPA). These pioneering pharmacists were the forerunners of their modern-day peers' involvement in vaccine-preventable diseases (VPD). **Today, pharmacists in all 50 states provide immunizations and assist in proactively preventing disease!** While each state has differing rules that regulate the age of the patient and type of vaccination that can be provided, data clearly indicates that immunization rates have increased since the addition of nationwide pharmacist immunization certification.

### **Medication Therapy Management (MTM)**

MTM is a relatively new area of medical care – ideally provided by pharmacists in concert with the patient's medical treatment team – designed to optimize drug therapy and improve therapeutic outcomes. With extensive training in pathophysiology, pharmacology and pharmacotherapy, pharmacy management and administration, pharmacists are well suited, effectively located and positioned in the community to positively impact patient outcomes through MTM services.

MTM includes a broad range of professional activities, such as a comprehensive medication review, development of a personal medication therapy review (MTR) and medication treatment action plan, monitoring the safe and effective use of medication therapy, and enhancing each patient's adherence to a medication regimen. With a large portion of health care spending allocated to medication costs, studies have shown that pharmacist acumen contributes to an increase in patient medication safety and adherence, improvement in overall health outcomes, and a reduction in health care costs.

### **Population Health**

Lastly, population health presents a gem of an opportunity for expansion of the pharmacist's role. As the relationship between health care payers, pharmacies and providers continues to evolve and become more complex, the transition of our health care system to a pay-for-performance model, and the unsustainable rising costs of health care, there is a need for a more efficient and team-based approach. The establishment of Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS), STAR ratings, Medicare Access and CHIP reauthorization act (MACRA) and other initiatives are designed to ensure quality and reduce costs.

Pharmacists have become recognized as important members of a patient's health care team and are being integrated in public health departments, physician-based clinics and other locations where their medication knowledge, patient counseling skills and ability to identify best medication use practices can be effectively utilized.

When looking for a prescription for better health, don't forget to look beyond your pill bottle and see your pharmacist! ▽