
Expanding Roles in Healthcare: Addressing Clinician Burnout & Enhancing Care



Healthcare systems are grappling with critical issues, including workforce shortages and clinician burnout, particularly in primary care. The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis projects a 68,020 primary care physicians shortage by 2036, with rural and non-metro areas experiencing the most acute deficits. A survey of 506 U.S. clinicians—including pharmacists, physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners—was conducted to understand the challenges and opportunities in healthcare. This article delves into the survey findings, examining the evolving roles within healthcare teams and potential strategies to enhance patient care.

Addressing Burnout and High Costs

Clinician burnout and high prescription costs are paramount concerns for healthcare providers. The survey revealed that 29% of physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners are considering leaving their profession due to burnout, up from 24% in 2023. This trend underscores the increasing stress and dissatisfaction among healthcare workers. Pharmacists, who play a crucial role in patient care, often find themselves limited by the scope of their roles and the systemic challenges they face. Only 36% of pharmacists reported feeling adequately positioned to provide their patients the necessary care. Additionally, the difficulty in securely sharing patient information—reported by only 27% of pharmacists and 39% of other clinicians as somewhat easy—further complicates comprehensive patient care. These challenges highlight the need for systemic changes to support healthcare professionals and improve patient outcomes.

Enhancing Patient-Focused Care Through Expanded Roles

Healthcare providers and industry leaders advocate for strategies to reduce administrative burdens, improve information-sharing, and address policy barriers to foster patient-focused care. One promising approach involves expanding the role of pharmacists in primary care settings. Many clinicians see potential in pharmacists performing point-of-care testing, managing medications for chronic conditions, and even prescribing medications for specific ailments. This expansion is particularly valuable in rural areas, where access to healthcare providers may be limited. However, the implementation of these expanded roles faces significant policy hurdles. The scope of practice for pharmacists varies widely across states, with some allowing broader prescribing authority than others. This inconsistency creates challenges in scaling successful care models nationally, particularly concerning services like prescribing PrEP, PEP, and hormonal contraception.

The Impact of E-Prescribing on Care Delivery

E-prescribing data from the Surescripts network reveals a notable increase in pharmacist-issued prescriptions, rising by 13% between 2022 and 2023. The number of pharmacists issuing these prescriptions also grew by 28.8% during the same period. This trend highlights the growing involvement of pharmacists in direct patient care, particularly in states with more expansive scope-of-practice laws such as California, New Mexico, and New York. These states accounted for 52.9% of pharmacist-issued e-prescriptions in 2023, with common prescriptions including medications for chronic conditions like diabetes and psychiatric disorders. This data suggests that expanding the role of pharmacists could significantly reduce the burden on primary care providers and improve patient access to essential medications and services.

A Collaborative Path Forward

The insights gained from the survey and data analysis emphasise the need for a comprehensive approach to address the challenges facing the U.S. healthcare system. Expanding the roles of healthcare professionals, particularly pharmacists, is a promising strategy for enhancing patient care. This expansion requires supportive policies that allow healthcare professionals to practice to the full extent of their training, improved information-sharing technologies, and payment models that compensate all team members fairly for their services. As some states lead the way in modernising pharmacy practice, there is an opportunity for broader national adoption of these models. By addressing these challenges, the healthcare system can reduce clinician burnout, lower costs, and ensure that patients receive the comprehensive care they need. This period in American healthcare offers a pivotal chance to redefine and strengthen the healthcare workforce, paving the way for a more resilient and patient-centred healthcare system.

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