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## Letter to the Editor

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## Letter to the Editor

Olivia Hiddleston, a third-year pharmacy student from Enon, Ohio

In addition to providing patient-centered care through medication therapy management (MTM) and clinical services, pharmacists are taking a more active role in public health. While there are many ways pharmacists can impact public health at the micro and macro levels, several are important to highlight, such as education, promotion of healthy lifestyles, research for disease and injury prevention, and policy development.

**Education.** Pharmacists play an active role in public health by educating other health care professionals in aspects of medication therapy and prescribing. Now, more than ever, schools of pharmacy are incorporating public health education into their curriculums. The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education adopted the most recent *Accreditation Standards and Guidelines for the Professional Program in Pharmacy Leading to the Doctor of Pharmacy Degree*. The guidelines include the following performance competence regarding health and wellness, "Public Health: Promote to patients the importance of health, wellness, disease prevention, and management of their diseases and medication therapies to optimize outcomes."<sup>1</sup>

**Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles.** The accessibility of pharmacists to the public provides a great opportunity for the promotion of healthy lifestyles. One of four goals of Healthy People 2020, a compilation of science-based, 10-year national health goals, is to "promote quality of life, healthy development, and healthy behaviors across all life stages."<sup>2</sup> Due to regular face-to-face interaction with patients, pharmacists can encourage patients and consumers to make better decisions about their lifestyles.

**Research for Disease and Injury Prevention.** One of the 10 Essential Public Health Services set forth by the American Public Health Association is "research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems."<sup>3</sup> Once again, the accessibility of the professional pharmacist, as a member of the health care team, contributes to this aspect of public health. The treatment of patients with similar symptoms and conditions, as well as direct interaction with patients and consumers, allows for data collection that could benefit disease and injury research dealing with health disparities and geographical location.

**Policy Development.** According to the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, education outcomes should include "promote health improvement, wellness, and disease prevention in cooperation with patients, communities, at-risk populations, and other members of an interprofessional team of health care providers; apply population-specific data, quality assurance strategies, and research processes to develop

public health policy."<sup>4</sup> The many different fields of pharmacy practice allow pharmacists to communicate with other health care professionals, as well as researchers, in order to develop these policies that will enhance the public health on the macro level. In a policy statement on the role of the pharmacist in public health, the American Public Health Association states, "Pharmacists are in a prominent position to provide background data, legislative content and exposition to local, state, and federal governments. Pharmacists can and should contribute to public health legislation and regulation."<sup>5</sup>

Over the years, the role of the pharmacist in society has changed immensely. Pharmacy has made marked advancements in education, technology, economics and sociology – all in an effort to better serve the needs of patients and consumers. The practice of pharmacy has become more patient centered, focusing more on prevention of disease and its management as well as overall health. Through this metamorphosis, the doors have been opened for pharmacists to take an active role in public health, and the time for pharmacists to step up is here. From new policies and programs, such as Healthy People 2020, to drug take-back programs, the roles that pharmacists can play in public health have greatly expanded.

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