



Supporting the Frontline: Strengthening the Community Pharmacy Workforce

A webinar discussion made available through the
Health Workforce Technical Assistance Center

Goal of this webinar:

To provide an overview of the role of community pharmacy teams in healthcare and public health, presenting emerging evidence about the community pharmacy workforce



The Pharmacists Patient Care Process



What is community pharmacy?

- Community pharmacy
 - One of the most common types of pharmacy practices, along with hospital pharmacies
- Locations – on average, 1 pharmacy within 10-20 minute drive in contiguous U.S.
 - urban, suburban, and rural areas
- Accessibility - easy
 - Hours of operation range 8-24 hours daily, up to 7 days weekly
 - Appointments not required for most care services
- Types
 - Independent (often locally owned)
 - Chain (larger, national; smaller, regional or local)
 - Grocery store
 - Online



Who works in community pharmacies?

- Pharmacists
 - PharmD: 4-year (or equivalent) clinical doctorate training
 - assessment, diagnosis, prescribing and monitoring with focus on medication-related care
 - Residency and fellowship training - optional
 - National licensure board exams (NAPLEX and MPJE)
 - Specialty Board certification - optional (e.g. BCACP, CDCES, BCPS)
- Pharmacy Technicians & Assistants
 - Operations and client support
 - Training (on the job and/or formalized coursework) -varies per state
 - National certification exam (optional) – CPhT





Who utilizes community pharmacies?

- Individuals seeking
 - Prescription fill/refill services
 - Clinical services
 - medical assessment and triage
 - advice for self-care
 - education
 - clinical care (e.g. chronic condition management, PrEP, Test to Treat, Narcan)
 - Health promotion services (e.g. travel vaccines)
 - Health screening (e.g. blood pressure)
- Health professionals seeking
 - consultation to guide treatment planning

Scope, Impact, and Possibilities

- 67,000 community pharmacies in the US
- 88.9% of US individuals live within 5 miles of at least 1 pharmacy
- Critical public health domains currently supported by community pharmacy
 - Immunization against vaccine-preventable disease
 - HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)
 - Hypertension screening and management
 - Overdose prevention and treatment
 - Reproductive health care

A report to the US Surgeon General 2011

“Pharmacists’ formal education appropriately prepares them to successfully perform clinical services related to the prevention and control of disease through medications. Pharmacists are also well-positioned (through accessibility, expertise and experience) to play a much larger primary care role in the U.S. health care system to meet these demands and improve health care delivery (and the health) of the nation.”

<https://jcopp.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Improving-Patient-and-Health-System-Outcomes-through-Advanced-Pharmacy-Practice.pdf>

Community Pharmacy Workforce Research

Jennifer Bacci, PharmD, MPH, BCACP, FCCP
Associate Professor, School of Pharmacy
Investigator, Center for Health Workforce Studies
University of Washington
jbacci@uw.edu

University of Washington Center for Health Workforce Studies (UW CHWS)

OUR MISSION

The UW CHWS elevates the importance of the workers who comprise the health workforce in policy discussions and decisions. To accomplish its mission, the UW CHWS:

- conducts research to inform health workforce planning and policy;
- provides consultation to local, state, regional and national policy makers on health workforce issues;
- and develops and refines analytical methods to support health workforce planning.

Bianca Frogner, PhD, Professor, Director

Susan Skillman, MS, Senior Deputy Director

Paula Kett, PhD, MPH, RN, Assistant Director and Deputy Director, HWRC – Health Equity

Ben Stubbs, MPH, Deputy Director, HWRC – Allied Health Workforce

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Health Workforce Research Center (HWRC) Programs

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- [Oral Health Workforce Research Center at University at Albany, SUNY](#)
- [Consortium for Workforce Research in Public Health \(CWORPH\) at University of Minnesota](#)
- [Health Workforce Technical Assistance Center](#)

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Community Pharmacy Workforce

Bacci JL, Pollack SW, Skillman SM, Odegard PS, Danielson JH, Frogner BK. Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Community Pharmacy Workforce. *Med Care Res Rev.* 2024;81(1):39-48.
doi:10.1177/10775587231204101

Background

- Motivation:
 - Community pharmacies responded to critical public health needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, including provision of COVID-19 testing, vaccination and treatment
- Objective:
 - To describe the community pharmacy workforce's response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Methods:
 - Conducted 15 interviews with 18 community pharmacy and pharmacy association leaders from across US from January – May 2022

Results

THEME 1: Patient care at community pharmacies focused on fulfilling COVID-19 response needs

“...pharmacists are now administering COVID-19 vaccines... in addition, [pharmacists have been] able to do some testing to identify if a patient has [COVID-19] and then recommend therapy... and refer out if necessary.”

(Interview #7)

THEME 2: Pharmacists' history as immunizers & scope of practice expansions accelerated COVID-19 response

“There isn't one [industry] that could have responded in the way that community pharmacies responded... states that went all in on pharmacy early had an easier time rolling out [the COVID-19] vaccine and doing it at a pace that mattered.” (Interview #8)

“I have a technician that became certified to [administer] vaccines... It's really freed up [time] and we would never have been able to do as many vaccines as we have done without technicians being able to [administer vaccines].” (Interview #12)

Results

THEME 3: Workforce shortages & workload increases impeded COVID-19 response & contributed to burnout

“We’re always chronically low on trained pharmacy technicians... With the opportunity for technicians [to administer vaccines], the timing was not exceptional because we were asking them to do training while working exceptional number of hours in a very stressful environment...” (Interview #14)

“It’s [the need to receive] payment for services... we wouldn’t be on such thin margins... I think well-being would be better because we can be staffed appropriately.” (Interview #7)

THEME 4: Maintaining community pharmacy workforce’s readiness critical to future emergency preparedness & response

“The goal is to secure those gains that were extended under the PREP authority... I know the emergency authorization is still in effect... but it won’t always be... [it’s] really imperative to make sure that there can be consistency in the delivery of services throughout the country.” (Interview #12)

Implications

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the community pharmacy workforce:
 - Embraced new roles to address public health needs
 - Faced delays from need to implement temporary scope of practice expansions and reimbursement pathways
- As result, the community pharmacy workforce's capacity for future emergency response needs review:
 - Identify opportunities to institutionalize effective policies and needed resources
 - Maximize professional satisfaction and support a strong, ongoing workforce

Opportunities to Strengthen Pharmacy Technician Career Pathways Across Practice Settings

Bacci JL, Oster N, Pollack SW, Skillman SM. A qualitative analysis of opportunities to strengthen pharmacy technician career pathways across practice settings. *Am J Health Syst Pharm*. 2025;82(2):99-108. doi:10.1093/ajhp/zxae226

Background

- **Motivation:**
 - Pharmacy technicians are vital members of the pharmacy workforce
 - Demand for these pharmacy professionals is high across health system and community pharmacy settings
- **Objective:**
 - To identify pharmacy technician career pathways across pharmacy practice settings, including entry, recruitment and retention, and advancement, and identify opportunities to strengthen and expand those pathways
- **Methods:**
 - Conducted 14 interviews with 17 pharmacist and pharmacy technicians from pharmacy organizations, community pharmacies, health systems, and academia from across US from March – May 2023

Results: Career Entry

THEME 1: Healthcare interest and prior exposure facilitate pharmacy technician career discovery

“The [pathway] I see most common is they have a family member... that is working in pharmacy.... It’s also a great entry point for anyone who’s interested in healthcare in general.” [Interview 108, Pharmacy Technician]

THEME 2: Variation in and quantity of entry-level requirements can impede entry into pharmacy technician careers

“I absolutely think [uniform requirements are] needed... There [are] so many points of entry that one can get lost... I think uniform standards starting within training would be step one.” [Interview #111, Pharmacy Technician]

THEME 3: Proactive promotion of pharmacy technician careers needed

“I really think that just making sure you take care of the existing technician force you have because word of mouth is probably the most powerful recruiting tool... There is a lot of power in just doing the right thing by your employees, creating a positive work environment that people want to come work for.” [Interview #114, Pharmacist]

Results: Recruitment and Retention

THEME 4: Pharmacy technician compensation that is not aligned with job demands

“I think pay is another one... minimum wages have gone up in a lot of jobs... I don’t know that we are seeing an equivalent increase in being a pharmacy technician.” [Interview #113, Pharmacist]

THEME 5: Career ladders or lattices create advancement opportunities

“I think the thing we need to be doing most is... making [pharmacy technicians] as appealing as a career as possible, with wage, title, and opportunity... We’ve got 6 levels of technician pay that allows technicians to both move up, as well as diagonally and horizontally, too...” [Interview #114, Pharmacist]

Results: Professional Advancement

THEME 6: Pharmacy technician advancement limited by weak professional identity

“If I could change anything right now, it would be the lack of perception of the professionalization importance of the pharmacy technician... To begin with changing the perception, [we need] to remove the lens that it’s all about pharmacists...” [Interview #112, Pharmacy Technician]

THEME 7: Scope of practice policies can facilitate pharmacy technician advancement

“I think the movement toward delegat[ing] what is within the technician’s education and training is a good model. It seems to make a bit more sense than adding one task at a time, given how long legislation and regulations can take to be put in place.” [Interview #105, Pharmacist]

Implications

- Emerging opportunities to address the pharmacy technician shortage include:
 - Cultivating pharmacy technician professional identity formation
 - Creating career ladders and lattices
 - Addressing low compensation
 - Advocating for a standard of practice regulatory approach

Insights into Decreasing Applicants to Schools and Colleges of Pharmacy

Bacci JL, Oster NV, Skillman SM. Insights into Decreasing Applicants to Schools and Colleges of Pharmacy in the United States. University of Washington Center for Health Workforce Studies. August 2024. <https://familymedicine.uw.edu/chws/publications/insights-into-decreasing-applicants-to-schools-and-colleges-of-pharmacy-in-the-united-states/>

Background

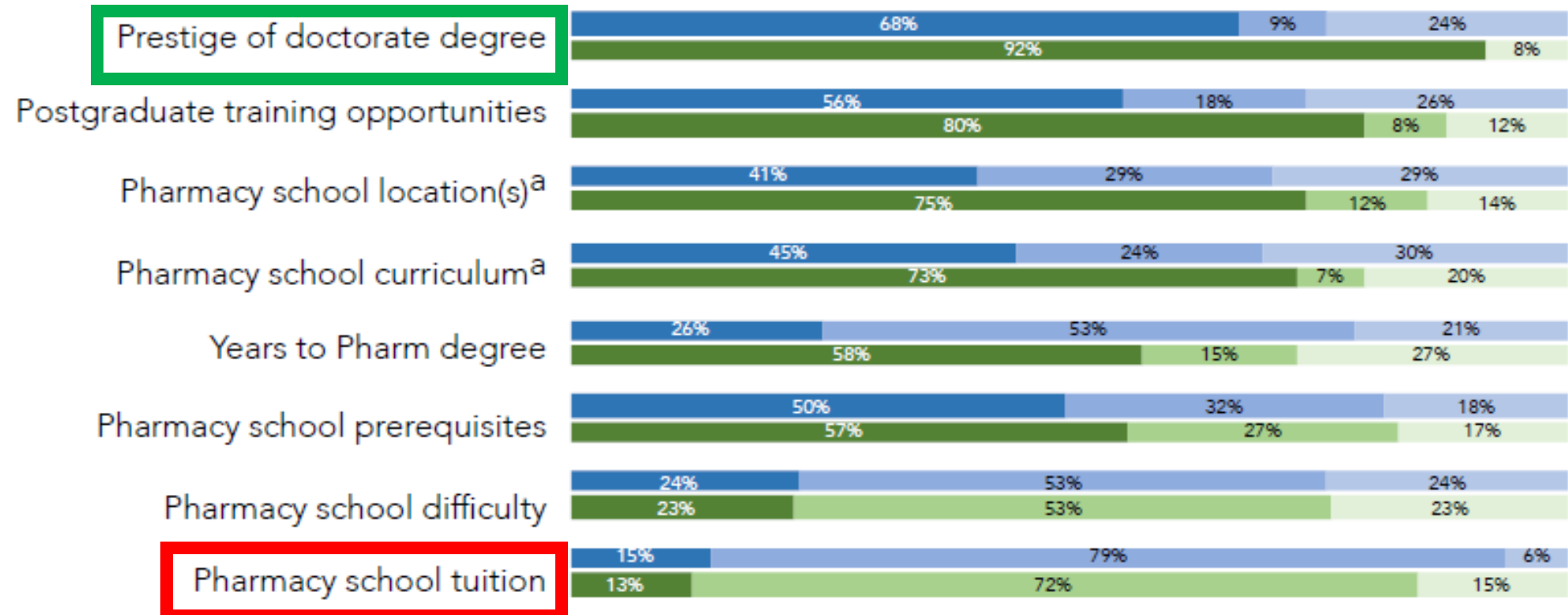
- **Motivation:**
 - The profession had been preparing for a projected pharmacist surplus due to rapid growth in the number of and enrollment in schools and colleges of pharmacy
 - However, the number of applicants to schools and colleges over pharmacy has declined over the past decade
- **Objective:**
 - To explore recent declines in pharmacy school applications by describing factors that influence undergraduate students' decision to study pharmacy
- **Methods:**
 - Conducted web-based survey of 94 undergraduate pre-pharmacy and health science students from 5 major research universities from May – October 2023

Participant Demographics

	Intention to apply to pharmacy school				Total N=94 (%)	
	Have applied or plan to apply (n=60)		Unsure/undecided (n=34)			
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Age, years^a						
<20	40	68%	9	26%	49	53%
20-25	18	31%	24	71%	42	45%
>26	1	2%	1	3%	2	2%
Gender^{b,c}						
Female	51	85%	23	68%	74	79%
Male	8	13%	11	32%	19	20%
Non-binary/use a different term	1	2%	1	3%	2	2%
Race and/or ethnicity^b						
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	1	3%	1	1%
Asian	16	27%	22	65%	38	40%
Black or African American	2	3%	1	3%	3	3%
Arab, Middle Eastern, North African	2	3%	0	0	2	2%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	1	2%	0	0	1	1%
White or of European descent	42	70%	15	44%	57	61%
Hispanic, Latino, or Latino origin	5	8%	2	6%	7	7%

Select Results

Factors related to education and training



Respondents that are unsure/undecided about applying to pharmacy school:

■ Positive / Somewhat positive
 ■ Somewhat negative / Negative
 ■ Did not influence / Not applicable

Respondents that have applied or plan to apply to pharmacy school:

■ Positive / Somewhat positive
 ■ Somewhat negative / Negative
 ■ Did not influence / Not applicable

Select Results

Experiences that influenced decision to study pharmacy

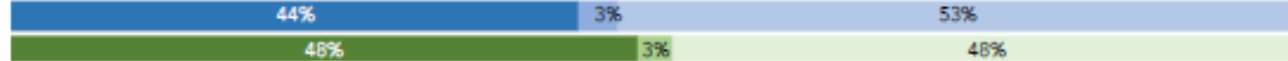
Enjoyment of science in high school or college



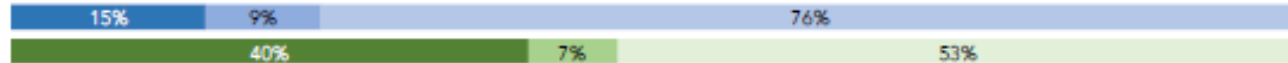
Pre-pharmacy club or organization



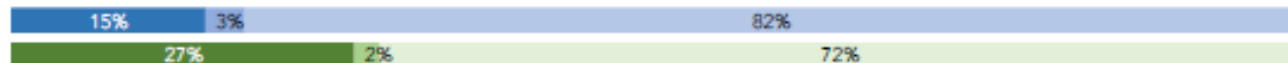
Experience as a pharmacy patient or customer



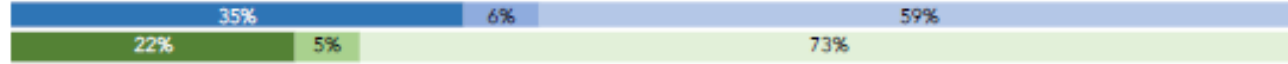
Previous pharmacy work experience



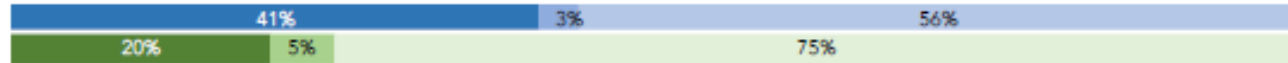
Career, pamphlet, book, or assessment



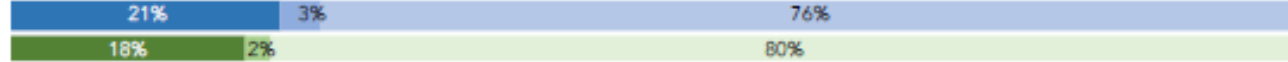
Social media



Media (e.g., TV show, movie, podcast)



Career fair or conference



Respondents that are unsure/undecided about applying to pharmacy school:

■ Positive / Somewhat positive
 ■ Somewhat negative / Negative
 ■ Did not influence / Not applicable

Respondents that have applied or plan to apply to pharmacy school:

■ Positive / Somewhat positive
 ■ Somewhat negative / Negative
 ■ Did not influence / Not applicable

Implications

- What remains the same?
 - Ability to work in healthcare, support people's health and well-being, pharmacists, and family members continue to have large positive influence on decision to study pharmacy
 - Schools/ colleges should prioritize recruitment methods that prioritize interactions with pharmacists and that deviate from conventional career fair paradigms
- What is new/ different?
 - Negative impact of pharmacy school tuition on decision to study pharmacy
 - 82.2% of graduating PharmD students in 2023 reported incurring debt to pay for degree; Borrowed ~\$168K on average
 - Opportunities to address financial burden: need-based scholarships, tuition discounting, and revenue stream diversification

Future Directions

Community Pharmacy Closures

- Approximately 20-30% of all community pharmacies, including corporate chain and independent community pharmacies, are projected to close in the next year
- The impact of pharmacy closures on patients and communities has drawn much recent attention, yet few have studied the impact of closures on the pharmacy workforce (e.g., pharmacists and pharmacy technicians)

THE BOTTOM LINE

Pharmacy deserts are appearing across U.S. as Rite Aid, Walgreens, CVS drug store closures spread

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Kevin Williams

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CBS EVENING NEWS

Independent drugstore closures threaten to turn communities into "pharmacy deserts"

CBS
EVENING
NEWS
—NORAH O'DONNELL

By Mark Strassmann, Samantha Wender
December 5, 2024 / 7:53 PM EST / CBS News

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Research Team

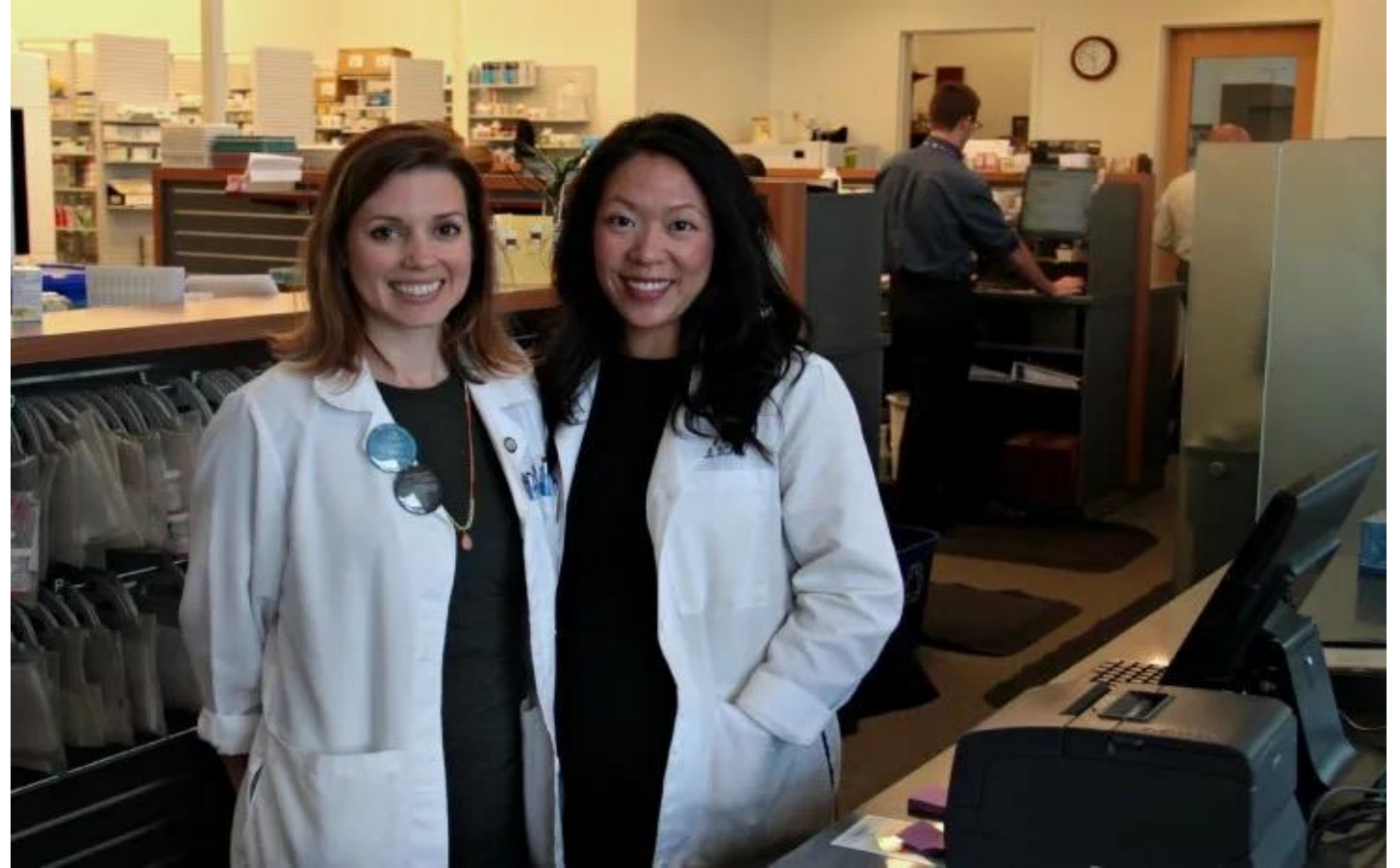
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<https://www.hrsa.gov/grants/manage/acknowledge-hrsa-funding>

Kelley-Ross Pharmacy- Est. 1925



COVID-19 and MPOX vaccine clinics



Long-Term Care/In-Home Care

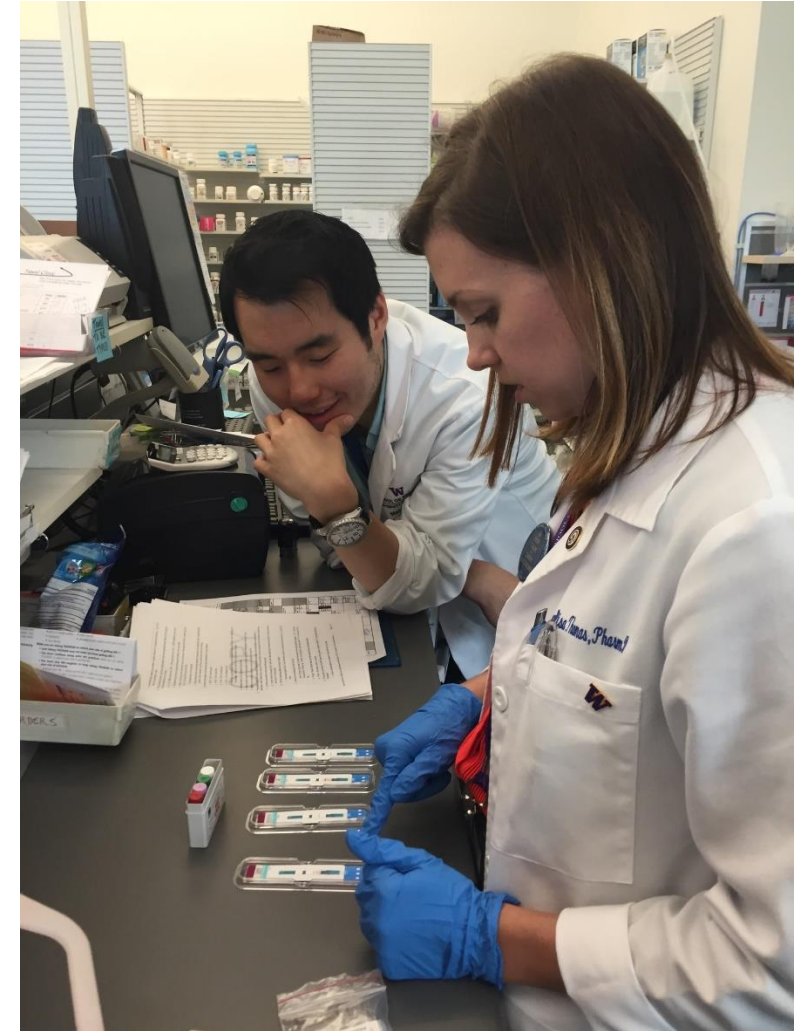


Naloxone and HIV Prevention (PrEP)

Naloxone Training Video Multi-Product



Video Host: Allyson Eichner, PharmD
Pharmacist with Kelley-Ross Pharmacy Group



Thank you!

Discussion & Questions

