

Commentary

To Prescribe or not Prescribe that is the Question!

Alam Sher^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5}

1. Mental Health Clinical Pharmacist, Togus, VA Medical Center, Augusta, ME 04330
2. Visiting Scholar, Higher Ed. Commission of Pakistan, Faculty of Pharmacy and Alternative Medicine, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan
3. Adj. Assoc. Professor of Pharmacy Practice, Mass College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences, Boston, MA
4. Adj. Cl. Assist. Professor of Pharmacy Practice, College of Pharmacy, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI
5. Cl. Assoc. Professor of Family Medicine (Psychiatry) College of Osteopathic Medicine, University of New England Biddeford, Maine

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To prescribe or not prescribed that is the question. If William Shakespeare was a pharmacist and living today he could probably ask his fellow pharmacists this question. To put it another way, should pharmacists be allowed to extend number of refills without prior authorization from the prescriber or even initiate new prescription? In Ontario, Canada, a new bill was proposed to allow pharmacists to extend refills on prescriptions without first checking it with the original prescriber of the prescription. In New Brunswick, Canada, they were moving in the direction of allowing pharmacists to diagnose and prescribe for minor illnesses. In the last five years, seven out of ten Canadian provinces now allow pharmacists to prescribe in some fashion that include extending refills on an existing prescription or allowing them to initiate a new prescription. As one can see that the precedent has already set where pharmacists are allowed to extend refills on prescriptions without first checking it with prescribers. As one can imagine, this is rather controversial as some of the medical associations fear that this would set a wrong precedent while some physicians, albeit at individual level, are welcoming it both in Canada and the United States. The US Department of Veterans Affairs and some of the other Public Health Agencies' pharmacists have long been extending refills on prescriptions. As a matter of fact, the VA pharmacists were recently authorized to initiate new prescriptions as mid-level practitioners. In Florida, the pharmacists have been prescribing from a limited formulary list of medications for many years now.

There is also a recent concerted and collaborative effort by the major US pharmacists' societies to get pharmacists well-deserved and about time recognition as a health care provider by the major governmental such as Medicaid, Medicare and non-governmental third parties. The Walgreen, a chain drugstore, is at the forefront of this movement and has already created three new 'accountable care organizations' (ACO) in New Jersey, Florida and Texas. The Walgreen pharmacists will be recognized as 'providers' and counsel patients, especially Medicare patients, on their medication adherence and act as pharmacotherapy liaison between physicians and patient.

Based on these trends it is safe to say that the profession of pharmacy is headed towards taking on a new role as a prescriber. There already exist a huge interest among practicing pharmacists to gain additional physical assessment education and training. Some of the colleges of pharmacy (COP), for example, the COP, the University of Southern California, are already providing education and training in physical assessment to their students. Time will tell if Pakistani pharmacists are allowed to prescribe or not as the practice of clinical pharmacy is not fully evolved there yet. Interesting times lie ahead!

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