

Who and What are Senior Care Pharmacists?

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- Today there are 38 million seniors in the United States; by 2030, that number will rise to 75 million.
- Every day in the United States, another 6,000 people reach the age of 65.
- *28% of hospitalizations among seniors are due to adverse drug reactions.*
- *32,000 seniors suffer hip fractures each year due to falls caused by medication-related problems.*
- *The elderly account for 12.7% of the U.S. population, but consume approximately 34% of total prescriptions.*
- *On average, individuals 65 to 69 years old take nearly 14 prescriptions per year, individuals aged 80 to 84 take an average of 18 prescriptions per year.*

Geriatrics is a specialty practice for which senior care pharmacists are the specialists. For millions of senior citizens and individuals with chronic illnesses, senior care pharmacists play a vital role in ensuring optimal drug therapy. In their role as medication therapy experts, senior care pharmacists take responsibility for their patients' medication-related needs; ensure that their patients' medications are the most appropriate, the most effective, the safest possible, and are used correctly; and identify, resolve, and prevent medication-related problems that may interfere with the goals of therapy.

Senior care pharmacists manage and improve drug therapy and improve the quality of life of the senior population and other individuals residing in a variety of environments, including hospitals, nursing facilities, sub-acute care and assisted living facilities, psychiatric hospitals, hospice, and home- and community-based care. Senior care pharmacists see patients as individuals for whom quality of life and quality of care are mutually significant and necessary. In other words, these pharmacists believe in holistic health, which refers to a philosophy of medical care that views physical and mental aspects of life as closely interconnected and equally important approaches to treatment.

Senior care pharmacists are committed to caring for the well-being of each individual, taking into account the complex interrelationships between disease states, nutrition, medications, and other variables. They are essential players on the health care team, and influential decision-makers in all aspects of drug therapy. Senior care pharmacists counsel patients, provide information and recommendations to prescribers and caregivers, review patients' drug regimens, present in-service educational programs, and oversee medication distribution services.

Services provided by senior care pharmacists include, but are not limited to:

- Disease assessment/management
- Drug regimen review
- Drug research programs
- Medication management
- Patient counseling

- Pharmacokinetic dosing services
- Physical assessment

Senior care pharmacists can be found wherever seniors reside. Examples of practice settings include:

- Adult day care centers
- Assisted living facilities
- Home health agencies
- Hospice programs
- Naturally occurring retirement communities
- Nursing facilities
- Psychiatric hospitals
- Senior centers
- Sub-acute care facilities
- VA hospitals
- Community Pharmacies

Senior care pharmacists develop, maintain, and enhance their clinical competence in geriatrics through life-long learning. Some examples include post-graduate residencies, experiential traineeship, reviewing the most current geriatric literature, and continuing pharmaceutical education focused on geriatrics and senior care pharmacy. Senior care pharmacists may even formalize their competency in geriatrics through recognized certification and credentialing programs.

“Any symptom in an elderly patient should be considered a drug side effect until proven otherwise”

J. Gurwitz et al. Brown University