



March 27, 2020 – Pharmacists have an extremely important role in health care during this COVID-19 pandemic. As stated by the National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations (NASPA), “Pharmacists are the most accessible healthcare providers and the first touchpoint of patient engagement with the healthcare system. In fact, 90% of all Americans live within five miles of a community pharmacy.”

With the strain on our healthcare system during these heightened times, pharmacists are positioned to ensure the public has access to necessary medications and other healthcare services. Pharmacists and pharmacy staff are a part of the essential healthcare workforce. Pharmacies are essential, not because of the products in the aisles, but because of the medications and information provided by these highly trained clinicians every day.

Pharmacies are remaining open throughout this crisis, and many pharmacies have taken steps to minimize both patient and staff exposure risk to continue to be able to continue to provide services in a safe way. These procedures may vary by pharmacy, some closing lobbies, making home delivery, drive-through, or curbside pick-up more available. Patients should contact their pharmacy to find out what policies are in place during this pandemic.

Please be patient with your pharmacist and pharmacy staff as they work to ensure the best outcomes for you and your community. Even prior to this crisis, pharmacies were operating on a razor’s edge because of anti-competitive practices from middle men in the prescription insurance sector. Additionally, many pharmacists were experiencing staffing shortages and challenging working conditions. Pharmacists’ commitment to providing safe patient care has not wavered under these conditions, and it will not waver under the threat of COVID-19. That said, like other frontline health care providers, the pharmacy team needs personal protective equipment and measures to help prevent the spread of this disease.

For your health and safety, beware of scams and false treatments for COVID-19. At this time, there are no recommended treatments, so do not purchase anything that purports to prevent or treat COVID-19. This includes chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine if you are currently healthy.

Pharmacists are working with their patients to determine if they should continue receiving one-month (30-day) prescriptions or increase to a 90-day supply. Most insurance companies in Vermont, including Vermont Medicaid, will allow 90-day fills to encourage social distancing and minimize visits to a pharmacy. However, drug shortages and stress on the pharmaceutical supply chain are concerns and may be exacerbated. In the event of drug shortages, pharmacists have the training to perform ‘therapeutic interchange’ to ensure patients receive their necessary medications.

VPA’s President Sandy Rosa, RPh stated, “In the ‘Oath of the Pharmacist,’ which applies to all aspects of the profession it says, ‘I promise to devote myself to a lifetime of service to others through the profession of pharmacy. In fulfilling this vow, I will consider the welfare of humanity and relief of suffering my primary concerns.’ Pharmacists are willingly putting themselves on the frontlines to meet the needs of their patients. We are here and ready to help!”

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