



HUMAN  
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# THE LGBTQ PATIENT'S GUIDE TO PHARMACY CARE

Your pharmacist is an integral part of your healthcare team. Pharmacists do much more than count out pills and pour liquids to fill prescriptions. Here are some of the key roles that a pharmacist can play in your healthcare:

## **Dispense the correct medications and ensure the safe use of medications**

Pharmacists dispense prescription medications to patients and offer expertise in the safe use of prescriptions. Correct dispensing of a medication can be a matter of life and death. Pharmacists help prevent overdoses and dangerous drug interactions by tracking the amounts and combinations of the drugs you take. Pharmacists can also make sure any over-the-counter medications you are taking are safe to use with your prescription medications.

## **Wellness management**

Pharmacists can provide advice on diet, exercise, stress management and disease prevention. Talk to your pharmacist about any chronic conditions you may have, mental health issues, or if you are interested in smoking cessation. As an important part of the healthcare team, pharmacists can also be a resource and refer you to additional services offered in your community.

## **Specialized knowledge**

Your pharmacist can help you understand more complex medication protocols and offer assistance in understanding your insurance.

## **Transgender patients and hormone therapy**

Long-term use of hormones carries potential health risks. Your pharmacist can play an important role in monitoring potential drug interactions and can offer advice on which medications may be most beneficial for you. Pharmacists can also play an important role in advocating with insurance companies that may deny coverage for hormone therapy.

## **HIV prevention and treatment**

Pharmacists can play a vital role in the prevention and treatment of HIV in the following ways:

- HIV testing and early HIV diagnosis gives people the opportunity to start treatment as soon as possible, which is essential to prolonging life, improving health outcomes, and helping prevent the transmission of HIV to others. Some pharmacists offer on-site testing and/or can refer you to community testing sites.
- Your pharmacist can help you understand the proper use of PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis), the once-daily pill regimen that can help you stay HIV-negative. PrEP regimens may be covered by private insurance and/or Medicaid and your pharmacist can help you understand your payment options.
- Your pharmacist can also help you understand the proper use of PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis), which is an HIV prevention strategy that involves taking anti-HIV medications immediately after a single, high-risk exposure (e.g., condomless sex with someone whose HIV status you do not know). PEP regimens may be covered by private insurance and/or Medicaid and your pharmacist can help you understand your payment options.
- Pharmacists are an essential member of a person's HIV care team and their involvement in managing HIV-related care has been associated with improved health outcomes.

## Administer vaccinations

Depending on the state you live in, pharmacists can administer many different vaccines. Ask your pharmacist about the immunization laws in your state. Some of the most important vaccines for LGBTQ people to consider include:

- *HPV (Human Papillomavirus)* - HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the United States. More than half of sexually active men and women are infected with HPV at some time in their lives. HPV is usually spread through sexual contact. Most HPV infections don't cause any symptoms and go away on their own, but HPV can cause cervical cancer in women, anal cancer in men, and is also associated with several less common cancers. HPV can also cause genital warts and warts in the throat. There is no cure for HPV infection. The vaccine protects against several of the most common and high-risk forms of the virus.
- *Hep B (Hepatitis B)* - Hepatitis B is a serious infection that affects the liver. Hepatitis B virus is easily spread through contact with the blood or other bodily fluids of an infected person. People can also be infected from contact with a contaminated object, where the virus can live for up to seven days. Unvaccinated adults at risk for hepatitis B infection include: sexual partners of people infected with hepatitis B, men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, hormones or steroids, people with more than one sexual partner, and people living with HIV.
- *Hep A (Hepatitis A)* - Hepatitis A is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis A is usually spread by close personal contact and sometimes by eating food or drinking water containing the virus, and it is easily passed to others within the same household. Unvaccinated adults at risk for hepatitis A include: men who have sex with men and people who inject drugs, hormones or steroids.

Building a relationship with your pharmacist is important in ensuring you get the most out of your medication therapy. **Everyone deserves to understand their medications and to feel comfortable asking for assistance whenever it is needed.** No matter how unique your question or concern, we have probably heard it before, and we are here to help! We know the healthcare network can be tricky to navigate, which is why we often advocate for our patients. Trust your pharmacist- we are on your side.

- **Kevin Eich, PharmD**

Pharmacist, Wegmans Pharmacy (Rochester, NY)

## Build a relationship with your pharmacist

You have many options for filling your prescriptions, so choose a pharmacist you trust and get to know them. Building a long-term partnership is important for your good health. Here are some key things to talk with your pharmacist about:

- Have an open dialogue with your pharmacist. Share your medical history, tell them any medications you are taking (including over the counter medications) and any allergies you may have.
- Remember to listen to your pharmacist and read printed materials. It is important to follow all directions related to proper use and disposal of your medications.
- Ask your pharmacist if you're uncertain about anything: What is this medication? What do the symbols on these warning labels mean? Is there something about this medication that isn't what you expected (color, smell, dosage, name or it seems different)?
- Ask your pharmacist about automatic refills and ways to speed up the process of prior authorizations.
- If you cannot afford your medications, ask your doctor or pharmacist about drug benefits that may be available to people in your age or income range, or if there are less costly options for treatment and how they may differ. You should not skip doses or split pills to save money on your medications.