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# ALUMNI SERIES

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## The Significance of Community Pharmacies' Services Beyond Dispensing Separation (DS)

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The debate on dispensing separation (DS) for community pharmacists in Malaysia has been ongoing for decades, giving rise to numerous arguments [1, 2]. Despite the benefits of DS, which include optimizing patient safety, reducing medication errors, and lowering medication costs [3], the implementation of this policy in our country remains unachievable, despite strong public support and evidence [4].

In view of the evolving role of community pharmacists, who have transitioned from medication dispensing to providing patient care services, community-based pharmacist practitioners are now capable of developing innovative community pharmacy practices and offer patient care services as a step towards overcoming DS. Hence, Malaysian community pharmacists should explore alternative initiatives that hold more promise in enhancing healthcare quality and improving public health. The following are examples of services community pharmacists can provide at their pharmacies:

### COMMUNITY PHARMACIST-LED MEDICATION REVIEW

Community pharmacists are among the most accessible and trusted healthcare professionals due to their proximity to the community, which enables easy access to public health services. Owing to their accessibility, community pharmacies are appropriate locations for community pharmacists-led medication review, allowing for pharmaceutical care interventions, tackling poor medication management, addressing drug-related problems (DRPs), monitoring and optimizing use of medication, and managing poor compliance with drug therapy and inappropriate drug selection [5].

Community pharmacies are well-positioned to deliver medication review services, particularly in high-risk groups of patients who are taking high-risk medications such as warfarin, and those with asthma or chronic obstruction pulmonary disease (COPD) and post-discharged patients. Medication reviews performed by community pharmacists can encompass prescription reviews, compliance assessments, concordance reviews, and clinical medication reviews [6].

## **POST-DISCHARGE COMMUNITY PHARMACY-BASED MEDICATION RECONCILIATION AND ADHERENCE REVIEW**

After the hospital stay, patients are discharged home with new medications or changes to their pre-admission medication regimen. Some may transition to primary care or outpatient settings for ongoing treatment. This transition of care is a critical juncture where patients are vulnerable to medication-related issues, including medication discrepancies, non-adherence, and adverse drug events, which can lead to rehospitalization or even death [7].

In Canada, these issues have been addressed by community pharmacists through a medication reconciliation and adherence review program known as MedsCheck [8]. MedsCheck has reported a reduction in the risk of death and rehospitalization among older adults after discharge [9].

## **SPECIALIZED CARE SERVICES BY COMMUNITY PHARMACISTS**

Community pharmacies have the potential to offer specialized health services beyond traditional dispensing and counseling activities. These services include home health care, sports medicine, diabetic and hypertensive care, among others, and have been discussed for many years [10]. Community pharmacies are easily accessible without the need for appointments or referrals, making them ideal for extended patient-centered care services, which are in high demand today [11].

In addition to medication counseling and reconciliation, community pharmacies should prioritize specialized care services such as anticoagulation monitoring, diabetic and hypertensive care, asthma care, women's health initiatives, and minor ailment care when delivering patient-centered services to the community. Furthermore, community pharmacists can contribute to chronic disease management, including asthma, arthritis, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, depression, hypertension, osteoporosis, and palliative care [12]. Evidence shows the effectiveness of pharmacist interventions in improving asthma control, reducing coronary heart disease (CHD) risk factors, lowering HbA1c levels, decreasing systolic blood pressure, enhancing antidepressant therapy adherence, and improving osteoporosis screening among elderly women [13-18].

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