

R&E: Current Event Seminar 1

4/18/24

Start time: 7:13 PM

End time: 7:47 PM

Rising Drug Prices

- Big drug companies (e.g. Pfizer) raising prices on 400 medications across 140 brands
- Patients less likely to purchase drug(s) they're prescribed due to price concerns
- Affect pharmacy's ability to manage inventory efficiently → loss of money
 - EX: if the pharmacy orders some specific drugs for a patient that was prescribed, but the patient later decides not to pick them up, the pharmacy would be losing money from not being able to sell the drugs and having to return them after expiration

Overworked Staff

- Understaffed = expanded scope of responsibilities
 - EX: 2 people doing tasks meant for 3 people
- Higher demands to attend to aging population
 - Oftentimes, elderly population not familiar with things like calling, texting, or going online so they come to the pharmacy for every request they have
 - Increases workload for pharmacy staff
- Leads to Heightened staff + burnout of pharmacy staff
- Contributes to operational challenges within pharmacies → decreased efficiency + disruption of workflow

Lawsuits

- 3 chain pharmacies (Walgreens, CVS, Walmart) each paid \$13 billion in settlement to resolve lawsuits claiming they contributed to opioid epidemic
 - Dispensed opioid drugs despite obvious warning signs
- Rite Aid filed for bankruptcy in Oct 2023 (some stores closing down in low-income neighborhoods)
 - Due to deluge of lawsuits related to prescription opioids
 - Still a big chain company but they can't afford to open as many stores in like smaller cities (cannot make as much profit → leads to health disparities)
 - Prescribing/dispensing lots of opioid medications
 - Pharmacy staff should have paid more attention & they might not have followed some regulations

- Lawsuits take out a lot (financially) out of pharmacies bc they have to pay large amounts to settle lawsuits or compensate certain parties
- **Discussion Questions:**
 1. *Which of these causes that we went covered do you think has the biggest impact on pharmacy closures? Why?*
 - Officer 1: rising drug prices bc it always comes down to money in the end
 - Lawsuits are a big thing but they're not common
 - Member 1: if pharmacies are not making enough profit, then they're not able to hire as many staff → leads to overworked staff and more stress
 - Officer 2: drug prices are the foundation and lawsuits are like the final straw
 2. *Are there things that could've been intervened with before they led up to closures?*
 - Officer 1: quality control + making sure that they're being safe so that their staff don't make mistakes
 - Member 1: consequences are inevitable so pharmacies cannot control rising drug prices
 - Officer 2: rising drug prices arise from drug shortages, inflation, increase profit margins
 - Officer 1: fluctuations in demand for certain drugs (e.g. ADHD, Ozempic, Mounjaro)
 - Higher demand → drug shortage → increase in prices
 - Officer 3: believes that the only solution is that the government can intervene ⇒ limit drug prices for pharmacies to abide by
 - Officer 2: heard from her friend who's a pharm tech at Rite Aid about issues regarding the administrative team there
 - Issue #1: friend is allowed to fill medications even after their 6 months of tech-in-training ended
 - Administrative team didn't stop them from filling
 - Issue #2: friend is taking the PTCB soon to get licensed + said that the pharmacist can help her take the exam at the pharmacy (since it's online now)

Effects and Solutions

- **Impacts of closures**
 - Insurance reimbursement for prescriptions have decreased

- Other solutions:
 - Can also train pharmacy staff better
 - Inform patients about drug coupons to reduce high costs of medications
- Member 2: improve system with AI technology to prevent overprescriptions for certain medications
- Officer 3: can improve same-day delivery
 - EX: patient has to be present at the door when receiving medication to prevent thieves from stealing medications
 - Better training + quality control of prescribing/dispensing medications

References

- [Why Your Drugstore Is Closing](#)
- [Local Pharmacies on the Brink, New Survey Reveals | NCPA](#)
- [Drugstore closures are leaving millions without easy access to a pharmacy](#)
- [It's Not Just a Pharmacy—Walgreens and CVS Closures Can Exacerbate Health Inequities | The Brink | Boston University](#)