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# Role of Community Pharmacies and Technicians Involved in Medical Distribution

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#### Commentary

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#### **DESCRIPTION**

In many parts of the world, community pharmacies are becoming more and more respected as sources of expert medical advice. This is also happening in China, where community pharmacies have become a source of first line medical treatment. The quantity of permanent residents, the geography, the accessibility to transportation, and the practical requirements of the area must all be taken into account while establishing and running a pharmacy in China. Ownership of a pharmacy is not limited to pharmacists, per the conditions for supervision of drug distribution approved by the CFDA in 2006, so long as a pharmaceutical professional is present when drugs are distributed and pharmaceutical care services are provided.

Community pharmacies are required to have pharmacists and pharmacy technicians who are legally qualified by the people's republic of China's drug administration law, which was updated in 2001. The majority of pharmacies offer medications without a pharmaceutical practitioner present since this rule is not effectively enforced. As a result, restrictions on running and owning community pharmacies were strengthened in the beginning of 2012. The state council's 12<sup>th</sup> five year strategy on drug safety mandates that 40 recently opened community pharmacies employ licenced pharmacists during business hours to guarantee the quality of the drugs and services provided. Also, all community pharmacies must be owned by pharmacists by the year 2015.

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Community pharmacies now play a substantially larger role in China as a result of the most recent round of health care reforms, which were implemented in 2009. Almost 388,000 community pharmacies existed in 2009, a 6.1% rise from the year before. The formation of pharmacy chains, which made up 35% of pharmacies in 2009 while the number of individual pharmacies fell, was the main cause of this surge. In China, there are 3532 persons served by each community pharmacy. In comparison, there were only 185,692 licenced pharmacists in 2010, or roughly 7380 people per licenced pharmacist, which is significantly more than in the United States, Canada, and other affluent nations.

In China, there is a shortage of pharmacists. Rural locations, where there is a persistent lack of workers in the hospital and community pharmacy sectors, are more affected by this shortage. There were 388,000 certified pharmacists and pharmaceutical professionals employed in various contexts in 2010. This figure equates to 0.29 pharmacists per 1000 persons, which is fewer than in Brazil and India. To practise, a community pharmacist must become a member of the provincial pharmacists association. The Chinese Pharmaceutical Association (CPA; sponsored by the Ministry of Civil Affairs) and the China licensed pharmacist association are the two professional organisations that represent all Chinese pharmacists working in community pharmacies (run by the CFDA).

In China, community pharmacies are a successful industry. The average yearly rise in Chinese drug sales from 1978 to 2009 was 20%, reaching USD 21.8 billion in that year. Nonetheless, hospitals continue to be the primary distribution channels for medications in China, with over 19,000 hospital pharmacies accounting for 74% of all medicine sales in 2009. The government is supporting the opening of community pharmacies that are not connected to hospitals, which is changing the situation. In opposed to many other nations, China lacks a national census of pharmacists; hence no official data on community pharmacist salaries are available.

Community pharmacies are permitted to sell both prescription and over the counter medications, with the exclusion of radiopharmaceuticals, vaccinations, some psychiatric medications, abortion pills, anabolic steroids, peptide hormones, and chemical substances used in the manufacture of narcotics. These medications can only be prescribed and given out at specific medical facilities. According to current laws, prescription drugs cannot be purchased without a valid doctor's prescription. In China, especially in rural regions, the unlawful sale of prescription pharmaceuticals (such as antibiotics) is frequent due to a lack of pharmacists and some dealers profit driven attitudes.