September 28, 2015

Dear Pharmacist:

Over the last 20 years, pharmacists have played an expanding role in reducing the risk of vaccine preventable illnesses by increasing the public’s awareness of the importance of vaccines and improving patient access to vaccination services throughout the United States. In 2016, the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) will celebrate the 20th anniversary of their National Certificate Training Program for Pharmacists on Pharmacy-Based Immunization Delivery. Due in large part to this program, the number of pharmacists trained to provide immunization services in the United States has grown from 40,000 pharmacists in 2007 to more than 260,000 in 2015. Training of students has also been strengthened; by 2016, all accredited schools of pharmacy in the US will be required to include immunization training of student pharmacists as part of their core curricula.

APhA’s commitment to training and collaboration has led to increasing access to vaccination services through expanded scopes of practice for immunizing pharmacists. In 1996, pharmacists were authorized to provide influenza vaccination services in 14 states, but by 2009, the year of the H1N1 influenza pandemic, immunizations-trained pharmacists in all states, D.C., and Puerto Rico were authorized to give influenza vaccines. The number of adults getting their influenza vaccination in community settings, including pharmacies, has increased from 6% of adults during the 2004-05 influenza season to over 18% in 2013-14. Pharmacists’ authority to administer other vaccines besides influenza vaccine has also expanded across the country to meet the needs of their communities.

In addition, APhA has worked to strengthen pharmacists’ commitment to immunizations through adoption of an APhA policy statement that all pharmacists should be up-to-date on their own vaccinations as a professional expectation. Indeed, pharmacists’ influenza vaccination rates have reached approximately 90% in recent years.

Your ability to target recommendations based on patients’ health conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, and pregnancy, has significant potential to improve vaccination of those at highest risk of severe illness. Research shows that vaccine recommendations from trusted providers are vital to increasing patients’ acceptance of needed vaccines; your practice sites provide an excellent opportunity for reinforcement of public health messages, assessment of patients’ immunization needs, strong recommendations for needed vaccines, and the provision of immunization services when indicated.

The ideal of the “immunization neighborhood” was coined by the APhA and is defined as “Collaboration, Coordination, and Communication among immunization stakeholders dedicated to meeting the immunization needs of the patient and protecting the community from vaccine-
preventable diseases.” We applaud each of you who are working collaboratively with other providers to ensure your “immunization neighborhoods” are fully realized and that patients’ immunization needs are served.

Despite progress for some vaccines, overall vaccination rates for adults in the United States remain much too low and racial and ethnic disparities in coverage remain. To address low vaccination rates and disparities, we ask for your continued efforts to support your “immunization neighborhood,” and implement National Vaccine Advisory Committee Standards for Adult Immunization Practice. These standards call on all providers to routinely assess patients for vaccines they may need; recommend needed vaccines; either offer immunizations or, where appropriate, refer to another provider for vaccination; and, ensure communication and documentation of vaccinations in your state or local health departments’ immunization information system, where available for adult patients.

My colleagues and I at the CDC applaud your accomplishments over the past twenty years and your continued efforts to improve the health of our communities by reducing the risk of vaccine-preventable diseases. Thank you for the care that you provide to your communities, the enthusiasm and innovation you have shown in addressing the needs for expanded access to vaccines, and for your leadership within the Immunization Neighborhood.

Sincerely,

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