Increasing Healthcare Access Through Pharmacist Statewide Protocols

The US Department of Health & Human Services expects the number of primary care physicians needed in the United States to reach 20,000 by 2020. However, with 91% of Americans living within five miles of a community pharmacy, pharmacists are an available and accessible healthcare professional and are ready to help address important health needs through statewide protocols.

The term statewide protocol refers to a framework that specifies the conditions under which pharmacists are authorized to provide a clinical service and order a specified medication or category of medication related to that service. Currently, Iowa law allows pharmacists to order and administer under statewide protocols for naloxone, immunizations, and nicotine replacement therapy. IPA’s proposed legislation would create two additional statewide protocols for tobacco cessation and point of care testing and treatment for flu and strep.

**Point of Care Testing and Treatment**

- **Point-of-care (POC) testing** involves performing a diagnostic test outside of a laboratory that produces a rapid and reliable result, aiding in identifying or managing chronic diseases and acute infections.
- POC testing for influenza and strep A by pharmacists allows for the screening and treatment process to be completed during a single encounter, thereby improving access to care, counseling, and patient outcomes. Patients can receive a diagnosis for a condition and be treated during a single visit instead of waiting weeks between lab exams and appointments.
- **Influenza** - Causes 12,000-50,000 deaths annually in the United States. Rapid testing for influenza A and B allows for accurate and timely treatment, as patients only have a 48-hour window to receive critical antiviral therapy.
- **Strep A** - Only 10-15% of adults with acute pharyngitis—a sore throat—test positive for strep, yet up to 75% are prescribed antibiotics. The majority of pharyngitis cases are viral and self-limiting in nature and could be symptomatically treated with OTC products. This allows pharmacists to play a role in combatting anti-biotic resistance.

**Tobacco Cessation**

- **Smoking-related illness** in the US costs more than $300 billion each year. Pharmacists are well-positioned to initiate treatment and support individuals throughout the quitting process.
- New Mexico, Colorado, and Idaho allow pharmacists authority to prescribe all FDA-approved tobacco cessation products, with legislation pending in more states.
- Smokers are 1.7 to 2.2 times more likely to quit smoking successfully for at least 5 months when receiving assistance from a local healthcare professional. Pharmacists, as the most accessible healthcare professionals, can play an integral role in helping individuals quit smoking.