



Outcomes Innovative Pharmacy Grant Final Report

Applicant Information

Applicant Name	Matthew Witry
Project Title	Iowa Pharmacists experiences and perspectives related to expanding their role in mental health intervention and referral in Iowa
Funding Amount	\$10,390

Final Report

Objectives: 1) describe Iowa community pharmacists' experiences, attitudes, and confidence related to patient mental health during COVID-19 and perspectives on the pharmacist's role in mental health and 2) identify potential training needs and practice innovation targets.

In total, 875 surveys were mailed, and 160 complete responses were received a 18.3% response rate. Of these, 28.6% were completed online. The most reported demographics were being a woman (65.0%), working as a staff pharmacist (61.9%). and practicing in a rural community (57.2%). This was a reasonable response rate and there were few instances of incomplete responses and consider the data collection a success.

Participation initially was slow. An initial pilot survey was sent to 200 Iowa pharmacists in November 2021 had a low response. The survey was shortened to 1 front and back legal page and delayed May and June 2022, when pharmacists were presumably less overwhelmed.

For the main results, respondents reported experiencing a variety of concerning situations in the past year including patients reporting major negative life events or appearing distressed (90% and 96.9%, respectively). Further, 65.6% reported a patient had mentioned loneliness, 23.8% made concerning statements related to suicide, and 8.8% disclosed suicidal thoughts. Most respondents had not asked about suicide or referred someone to crisis resources in the past year (78.9%, 82.6%). Most reported having no previous training in suicide prevention (62.1%). Respondents reported moderate levels of confidence in behaviors related to suicide prevention (3.5 SD 0.72) and reported the greatest interest in training on community mental health resources (65.2%) and making referrals 55.9%).

This survey provides evidence that community pharmacists in Iowa remained accessible to patients throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including to patients who may be struggling with their mental health. This sample of community pharmacists shared experiences of encountering patients in distress

with one-fourth of respondents hearing concerning statements from patients which may have been associated with suicidal thoughts. Providing pharmacists with additional training and support in understanding local mental health resources and making referrals may increase their confidence and use of key behaviors for addressing mental health issues of patients, including potential suicidality.

These results provide important preliminary data for further work in several areas. First, is the area of training in suicide prevention and intervening with persons experiencing a mental health crisis. Since over half of respondents were interested in further training, providing this training would address the need. There are already trainings available which could be implemented, including both live and via CE. Another potential direction would be working with regional agencies to develop referral resources, since mental health infrastructure can vary from region to region. Specific interventions also could be piloted such as training pharmacists and staff in rural areas of Iowa on intervention specific to farmers and agriculture workers. Also, these results may apply to recent attention from CPESN and other stakeholders who are piloting pharmacists engaging in screening for depression and anxiety with tools like the PHQ-2/9. Pharmacists may benefit from skill development in this area, with a logical component being intervening with patients in distress or experiencing a mental health crisis. These are areas where I am currently working to identify funding opportunities and collaborators.

Final Budget Report

Based on the funded amount from the IPA Foundation, please complete the grant budget in the table format below. Grant budgets must include all costs as well as any matching funds or in-kind support. Please include items from the entire project interval (pre- and post- interim report)

Budget Line Items	Total Costs	Source if outside grant (eg in kind or other funding)
TOTAL		

Please provide a summary of your project to be published in the Journal of IPA. (300 word maximum)

Iowa Pharmacists' experiences and perspectives related to patient distress, suicide, and training needs

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of having accessible community pharmacies, including in responding to patient needs related to mental health. The objective of this study were to describe Iowa community pharmacists' experiences, attitudes, confidence, and training needs related to patient mental health. This study used a 3-contact cross-sectional mailed survey design delivered between May and June, 2022. In total, 875 surveys were mailed, and 160 complete responses were received a 18.3% response rate. The most reported demographics were being a woman (65.0%), working as a staff pharmacist (61.9%). and practicing in a rural community (57.2%). Respondents reported experiencing a variety of concerning situations in the past year including patients reporting major negative life events or appearing distressed (90% and 96.9%, respectively). Further, 65.6% reported a patient had mentioned loneliness, 23.8% made concerning statements related to suicide, and 8.8% disclosed suicidal thoughts. Most respondents had not asked about suicide or referred someone to crisis resources in the past year (78.9%, 82.6%). Most reported having no previous training in suicide prevention (62.1%). Respondents reported moderate levels of confidence in behaviors related to suicide prevention (3.5 SD 0.72) and reported the greatest interest in training on community mental health resources (65.2%) and making referrals 55.9%). These findings have several important implications. First, Iowa pharmacists are routinely encountering patients who appear to be struggling with their mental health, including in areas like loneliness and difficult life events. Second, pharmacies are increasingly being tasked with tasks like screening patients for depression monitoring medications for mental illnesses. Increasing training of pharmacists and staff appears warranted, including in the areas conversations about suicide and making referrals to local resources.

Community pharmacists have remained accessible to patients throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including to patients who may be struggling with their mental health. This sample of community pharmacists shared experiences of encountering patients in distress with one-fourth of respondents hearing concerning statements from patients which may have been associated with suicidal thoughts. Providing pharmacists with additional training and support in understanding local mental health resources and making referrals may increase their confidence and use of key behaviors for addressing mental health issues of patients, including potential suicidality.