Examining the Current Role of Washington State Pharmacies in Pediatric Immunizations

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BACKGROUND

- Childhood vaccinations can prevent disease, hospitalization, and death
- Since 1996 pharmacists have been involved with immunizations, they are accessible and knowledgeable on administering vaccines
- Pharmacist involvement has increased immunization rates for children
- Vaccination rates for adolescents (13-17 y.o.) is higher than vaccination rates for children (19-35 months)
- Lack of accessibility for patients has decreased vaccination rates
- Many people are not aware of the vaccinations that are offered by pharmacies
- Many states have their own age requirements for pharmacists’ vaccination authority, AND retail chains have their own age requirements too

METHODS

HYPOTHESIS AND RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the minimum age at which Washington State pharmacies administer immunizations and what vaccines do pharmacies commonly administer to children ages 18 years and younger?

RESULTS

Figure 1. This chart and table show the age-limitsations for pharmacists to vaccinate children. Many states allow vaccination at any age, but not all.

Figure 2. (a) A phone script for the survey was written to ensure systematic and consistent data collection. The script was then submitted to the IRB board for approval. Once approved, pharmacies were called during normal business hours and asked to participate in a brief survey. All pharmacy personnel were allowed to participate. Data was then collected and analyzed using Microsoft excel. (b) A table of script questions asked during survey.

Figure 3. Vaccines Offered per Pharmacy. Data collected shows majority of pharmacies offer Tdap (51/58), HPV (40/58), Flu (56/58), and Hepatitis (41/58) vaccines. MCV (38/58) and Varicella (37/58) are the next most commonly stocked vaccines.

Figure 4. Pharmacy Age Restrictions. Most pharmacies are allowed to immunize at 3 years old or younger with only one being restricted to immunizing at 13 years old.

Figure 5. Child Vaccine Appointments. 22/58 pharmacies specified most childhood vaccines are seen seasonally during fall.

Figure 6. Vaccine Requests. Vaccines that are asked for but unavailable to patients. 25 pharmacies responded with travel vaccines or Yellow Fever.

DISCUSSION

The responses to the phone survey questions created some interesting findings. One observation was the availability of 97% of pharmacies having at least one ACIP recommended childhood vaccine in stock but low numbers of pediatric immunizations being conducted. Many respondents reported that most childhood vaccinations occur in the fall, however, some pharmacies reported not seeing any children come in for vaccinations. Research has shown a decrease in well-child visits and decreased vaccination rates since the COVID-19 national emergency,14 alluding to an increased need for pediatric vaccines.

Another interesting observation was the discussion about pharmacies not being able to immunize pediatric patients due to insurance restrictions. Some state Washington plans require patients under the age of 18 to receive their vaccines from their primary care provider and will not cover community pharmacy vaccinations. This restriction could be an explanations as to why pharmacies are being underutilized in regards to pediatric immunizations.

LIMITATIONS

Data for this review was conducted and collected in the state of Washington only. It is not generalizable to other states but is generalizable to other counties in the state. The data was collected in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic where many pharmacies were too busy to participate or might have been changing their policies and procedures in regards to vaccine administration.

NEXT STEPS

Next steps for this research include further investigation into the barriers of providing immunization services. Additionally, survey expansion to surrounding states could provide a valuable perspective when assessing where Washington stands in comparison to other states’ immunization practices. Washington is known to be a fairly progressive state in pharmacy practice and might be quicker to implement new permissions such as those given by the PREP Act.

CONCLUSION

- Many pharmacies offer the same immunizations as a doctor’s office
- Most pharmacies have ACIP recommended immunizations in stock that would be available for walk in appointments
- Pediatric patients are seen at a much lower rate when compared to adult patients
- Insurance restrictions can limit pediatric patients from receiving recommended vaccinations in the community pharmacy setting
- Many Washington pharmacies are allowed to immunize patients 3 years old and younger

REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

