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# Geriatric Pharmacist

#### Overview

Open your grandmother's medicine cabinet, and you'll probably find many bottles of pills. Older people are more likely to be taking a variety of medications to manage multiple chronic health issues such as hypertension, diabetes, arthritis, Alzheimer's disease, pain, and other diseases and conditions associated with aging, as well as occasional problems like colds or infections.

Geriatric pharmacists, also known as consultant pharmacists, specialize in dispensing medication and counseling older patients about those medications. Like all pharmacists, they label medications and dispense them as prescribed by a physician or other health professional.

But geriatric pharmacists also tend to take extra time to speak with their patients to:

- Explain when and how to take the medication
- Describe any potential side effects, including possible adverse reactions
- Ensure that the new medication won't interact with any other prescriptions, nutritional supplements, or over-the-counter medications the patient is taking
- Make adjustments in dosage or recommend changes in medications to alleviate unwanted side effects
- Perform routine tests, such as blood-sugar and blood-pressure monitoring
- Answer questions about medication management and other health concerns
- Help patients save money by recommending generics or special insurance programs

In fact, some geriatric pharmacists don't dispense at all, but work solely in the consultant role as part of the health care team taking care of older adults. This takes place in long-term care facilities, assisted living facilities, hospice facilities, and numerous other care sites. Their main role in these settings is to ensure the best management of medications to foster better patient health.

Preventing adverse reactions is a key goal of the geriatric pharmacist. According to the Institute of Medicine, medication errors kill more than 100,000 people each year, including errors in medication dosing or administering a drug. Because older patients take more drugs, their risk of interaction is higher. Geriatric pharmacists are trained to screen for and help reduce these risks.

They can also help ensure that patients take their medication correctly and consistently. Patients don't always understand the importance of taking medications as prescribed. If they attribute a side effect, such as fatigue or sleeplessness, to the drug, they may stop taking it. A geriatric pharmacist can probe for these situations and either make a change in the patient's regimen or emphasize the need for taking the medication as ordered by the health care provider.

Pharmacists who work in busy pharmacies often don't have time to talk at length with their customers. Pharmacists treating older patients emphasize consultation to better meet the unique needs of their older patients.

## **Working Conditions**

Many geriatric pharmacists work in or near hospitals, long-term care facilities, assisted living centers and housing communities with large elderly populations. They may work in a pharmacy based in a health care facility, or in a retail pharmacy, serving older customers.

In addition to dispensing medication, they consult with patients, confer with physicians, and review medical charts.

While most work normal business hours, like most health professionals, geriatric pharmacists may have to be on call some evenings, weekends, and holidays.

## **Salary Range & Outlook**

Geriatric pharmacists can **earn** between \$80,000 and \$110,000 per year, depending on where they work and what responsibilities they hold.

The demand for geriatric pharmacists is expected to grow as the "Baby Boomer" generation ages. The Medicare drug benefit may also provide payment for medication therapy management services (MTMS), which cover the type of consultation geriatric pharmacists provide.

## **Academic Requirements**

Geriatric pharmacists must complete the same training program required of all pharmacists, a six-year pharmacy degree, which includes two years of general education.

The Commission for Certification in Geriatric Pharmacy (CCGP) first began certifying geriatric pharmacists in 1997. To become certified, a pharmacist must be licensed, have at least two years of work experience, pass a written exam, and fulfill continuing education requirements.

#### **Professional Associations**

- American Society of Consultant Pharmacists (ASCP)
- SeniorCarePharmacist.com
- Commission for Certification in Geriatric Pharmacy
- American Pharmacists Association (APhA)
- American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP)
- American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP)
- American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP)
- Board of Pharmaceutical Specialties (BPS)

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