

REFILL REMINDER: You are due for Mental Health Self-Care

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The pharmacy profession can be stressful, from completing 6 to 8 years of higher education to managing chaotic workplaces and everyday responsibilities of being a pharmacist. Pharmacists are the most accessible healthcare professionals to the public. Patients turn to pharmacists for recommendations, guidance, and answers regarding medications, health conditions, and so much more. Pharmacists often give pieces of themselves when helping patients, but that can take a toll on their mental health. This, however, can lead to burnout without them even realizing it.

Every day, pharmacists help patients who suffer from mental illnesses, but who helps pharmacists cope with their own? There is a huge stigma that discourages healthcare professionals from speaking about their mental health challenges. This stigma prevents pharmacists from finding the help they need, leaving them to face their struggles alone. Recently, there have been studies showing that pharmacists have higher suicide rates than the rest of the general population.

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically increased burnout in the profession as pharmacists were the frontline healthcare professionals for patients. Concerned and panicked, patients raced to pharmacies for COVID-19 tests, over-the-counter remedies, face masks, and overall information about the virus. Pharmacists were tasked with juggling challenges such as medication/supply shortages, inadequate staffing, health screenings, and staying up to date on new information. They also put their own health and safety on the line when working closely with patients who may have been exposed to the virus. When the new COVID-19 vaccines were released, pharmacies were overwhelmed with people waiting to be immunized. They also experienced increased harassment and verbal abuse from patients who were frustrated and upset about the pandemic. Trying to manage all of these issues while not being respected by the public, led to worsening mental health and feeling unappreciated for all their hard work. Along with all of these issues, pharmacies were facing financial burdens. This continues today as pharmacists can prescribe medications to treat COVID-19, but are not reimbursed for providing the extra service.

Pharmacists are so focused on taking care of patients, they often forget to take care of themselves. We personally know many pharmacists who do not take a full lunch break (or have a lunch break at all) because they are so busy and do not have time to eat. Recently they also have taken more time out of their day to prepare for the additional responsibilities that have been added since COVID-19 began. This prevents them from having a break and spending time with family, which is a much-needed remedy after a long day. All these factors along with the mental strain of everyday tasks done in the pharmacy, can severely affect their mental health. Decreased mental health can lead to decreased job satisfaction which is correlated with reduced productivity, quality of care, and increased medication errors. It is time for pharmacists to prescribe themselves a high dose of self-care for their own mental health.

Since October is American Pharmacists Month (APhM) as well as World Mental Health Day being held on October 10th, South Dakota State University's Student Collaboration for the Advancement and Promotion of Pharmacy (SCAPP) will be emphasizing both. SCAPP's Operation Mental Health and the APhM/Spring Awards Committee will be encouraging everyone to 'Thank-A-Pharmacist' to show they recognize and appreciate all the hard work and dedication of pharmacists. Whether they are a family member, friend, co-worker, professor, preceptor, or just your local pharmacist, we ask everyone to say thank you to show pharmacists are supported and appreciated for all they do.

Thank you!

If you or someone you know is struggling with a mental health concern, please call the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) at 1-800-950-NAMI (6264). If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988.