

Abstract

RURAL-CP: a rural community pharmacy practice-based research network in the USA

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AUTHORS



Delesha Carpenter¹ *



Patricia Mashburn² Community Pharmacist



Tessa Hastings³ Assistant Professor



Salisa Westrick⁴ Department Head and Sterling Professor



Meagen Rosenthal⁵ Associate Professor



Megan Smith⁶ Assistant Professor



Stephanie Kiser⁷ Professor of the Practice



Geoffrey Curran⁸ Professor

CORRESPONDENCE

*Associate Professor Delesha Carpenter dmcarpenter@unc.edu

AFFILIATIONS

^{1, 2, 7} University Of North Carolina At Chapel Hill, Asheville, NC, USA

³ University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, USA

⁴ Auburn University, Auburn, AL, USA

⁵ University of Mississippi, University, MS, USA

^{6, 8} University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Little Rock, AR, USA

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Abstract

Introduction: To strengthen and demonstrate the ability of rural pharmacists to address their communities' health needs, we developed the first multi-state rural community pharmacy practice-based research network (PBRN) in the USA called the Rural Research Alliance of Community Pharmacies (RURAL-CP). Our objective is to describe the process for developing RURAL-CP and discuss challenges to creating a PBRN during the pandemic.

Methods: We conducted a literature review of community pharmacy PBRNs and met with expert consultants to gain insight into PBRN best practices. We obtained funding to hire a postdoctoral research associate, conducted site visits, and administered a baseline survey, which assessed many aspects of the pharmacy, including staffing, services, and organizational climate. Pharmacy site visits were initially conducted in-person but were later adapted to a virtual format due to the pandemic.

Results: RURAL-CP is now a PBRN registered with the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality within the USA. Currently, 95 pharmacies across five southeastern states are enrolled. Conducting site visits was critical for developing rapport, demonstrating our commitment to engage with pharmacy staff, and appreciating the needs of each pharmacy. RURAL-CP pharmacists' main research priority was expanding reimbursable pharmacy services, especially for diabetes patients. Since enrollment, network pharmacists have participated in two COVID-19 surveys.

Discussion: RURAL-CP has been instrumental in identifying rural pharmacists' research priorities. COVID-19 provided an early test of the network infrastructure, which allowed us to quickly assess COVID-19 training and resource needs. We are refining policies and infrastructure to support future implementation research with network pharmacies.

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