The Definition of Clinical Pharmacy

American College of Clinical Pharmacy

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As articulated in its strategic plan, the American College of Clinical Pharmacy's (ACCP) 10–15-year vision for the profession is that pharmacists will be health care providers who are accountable for optimal medication therapy in the prevention and treatment of disease. To achieve this vision, the profession must ensure that there will be an adequate supply of appropriately educated and skilled clinical pharmacists. Toward that end, the ACCP Board of Regents has developed a definition of clinical pharmacy to serve as the foundation for the core competencies of a clinical pharmacist. Both short (abridged) and detailed (unabridged) definitions are provided below.

Abridged Definition of Clinical Pharmacy

Clinical pharmacy is defined as that area of pharmacy concerned with the science and practice of rational medication use.

Unabridged Definition of Clinical Pharmacy

Clinical pharmacy is a health science discipline in which pharmacists provide patient care that optimizes medication therapy and promotes health, wellness, and disease prevention. The practice of clinical pharmacy embraces the philosophy of pharmaceutical care; it blends a caring orientation with specialized therapeutic knowledge, experience, and judgment for the purpose of ensuring optimal patient outcomes. As a discipline, clinical pharmacy also has an obligation to contribute to the generation of new knowledge that advances health and quality of life.

Clinical pharmacists care for patients in all health care settings. They possess in-depth knowledge of medications that is integrated with a foundational understanding of the biomedical, pharmaceutical, sociobehavioral, and clinical sciences. To achieve desired therapeutic goals, the clinical pharmacist applies evidence-based therapeutic guidelines, evolving sciences, emerging technologies, and relevant legal, ethical, social, cultural, economic, and professional principles. In accordance, clinical pharmacists assume responsibility and accountability for managing medication therapy in direct patient care settings, whether practicing independently or in consultation or collaboration with other health care professionals. Clinical pharmacist researchers generate, disseminate, and apply new knowledge that contributes to improved health and quality of life.

Within the system of health care, clinical pharmacists are experts in the therapeutic use of medications. They routinely provide medication therapy evaluations and recommendations to patients and health care professionals. Clinical pharmacists are a primary source of scientifically valid information and advice regarding the safe, appropriate, and cost-effective use of medications.

Three-Part Definition

The unabridged definition is organized into three sections: the discipline of clinical pharmacy, the clinical pharmacist, and the roles of the clinical pharmacist in the health care system. Key words or phrases were carefully chosen for inclusion in each section, and their intended interpretation follows.

The Discipline of Clinical Pharmacy

The concept of optimizing therapy and promoting health, wellness, and disease prevention was felt to be essential in highlighting the focus on both pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic strategies

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for promoting patient health. By noting that clinical pharmacy embraces the philosophy of pharmaceutical care, the definition calls attention to the fact that the primary object of practice and research is ultimately the patient. Emphasizing that the discipline relies on caring values with specialized knowledge, experience, and judgment underscores the critical importance of the synergy achieved by combining a caring ethos, in-depth therapeutic knowledge, clinical experience, and expert judgment. As a discipline, clinical pharmacy must be engaged also in research to contribute to the generation of new knowledge that advances human health and quality of life.

The Clinical Pharmacist

Stating explicitly that the clinical pharmacist cares for patients in all health care settings emphasizes two points: that clinical pharmacists provide care to their patients (i.e., they don't just provide clinical services), and that this practice can occur in any practice setting. The clinical pharmacist's application of evidence and evolving sciences points out that clinical pharmacy is a scientifically rooted discipline; the application of legal, ethical, social, cultural, and economic principles serves to remind us that clinical pharmacy practice also takes into account societal factors that extend beyond science. By stating that clinical pharmacists assume responsibility and accountability for achieving therapeutic goals, the definition makes it clear that they are called upon to be more than consultants. Further, the mention of managing therapy in direct patient care settings is particularly important because it reinforces existing definitions of the term "clinical." For example, the *American Heritage College Dictionary* defines clinical as "involving or based on direct observation of the patient"[1]; *Dorland's Medical Dictionary* defines clinical medicine as "the study of disease by direct examination of the living patient."[2] That is, clinical pharmacists are involved in direct interaction with, and observation of, the patient. In addition, it is noted that clinical pharmacists practice both independently and in consultation or collaboration with other health care professionals, making it clear that they are members of an autonomous profession within their scope of practice yet also function as members of a cooperative health care team. Finally, attention is drawn to the scientific impact of clinical pharmacist researchers by stating that they generate, disseminate, and apply new knowledge that contributes to improved health and quality of life.

Roles Within the Health Care System

By noting that the clinical pharmacist is an expert in the therapeutic use of medications, this section indicates that the clinical pharmacist is recognized as providing a unique set of knowledge and skills to the health care system and is therefore qualified to assume the role of drug therapy expert. In addition, this expertise is used proactively to ensure and advance rational drug therapy, thereby averting many of the medication therapy misadventures that ensue following inappropriate therapeutic decisions made at the point of prescribing. Stating that the clinical pharmacist is a primary source of scientifically valid information and advice on the best use of medications emphasizes that the clinical pharmacist serves as an objective, evidence-based source of therapeutic information and recommendations. This expertise extends beyond traditional medications to include nontraditional therapies as well. Finally, indicating that clinical pharmacists routinely provide therapeutic evaluations and recommendations underscores the fact that their daily practice involves regular consultation with patients and health care professionals regarding medication therapy evaluations and recommendations.

References

1. **Anonymous**. American heritage dictionary of the English language, 4th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.
2. **Anonymous**. Dorland's illustrated medical dictionary, 31st ed. Philadelphia: Saunders, 2007.

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