

Implementation and assessment of the role of a VaxChamp in the community pharmacy setting

BACKGROUND

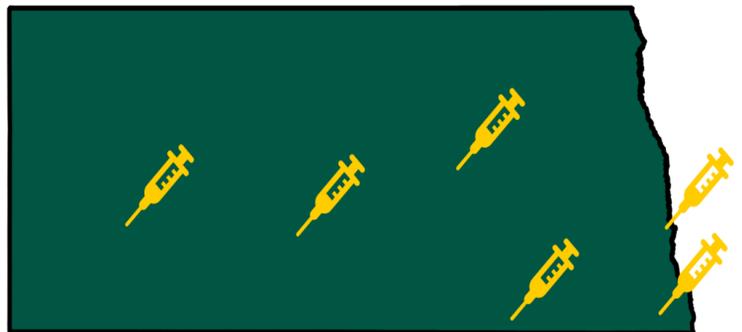
Immunization is crucial for public health, and community pharmacies offer convenient access to vaccines. Pharmacy technicians, originally authorized to administer vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic by the United States Department of Health and Human Services in October 2020, have continued this role in many states, including North Dakota (ND). In the clinic setting, the “VaxChamp” concept designates a trained nurse as a vaccine expert to boost vaccination rates. Following this model, pharmacy technicians were trained as VaxChamps in community pharmacies. The aim was to assess the impact on vaccination rates, pharmacy technician job satisfaction, and workflow at individual pharmacies.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Immunization rates vary greatly based on vaccination and location, but pilot sites did see a notable increase in the number of pneumococcal vaccinations given during the project.
2. Enhanced responsibilities, such as serving as a VaxChamp, can increase job satisfaction for pharmacy technicians.
3. Technicians play a crucial role in expanding vaccination services in the community pharmacy.

METHODS

Project planning and site selection began in July 2022. Using data from the ND Immunization Information System (NDIIS) and previous site visits, the team developed a list of potential community pharmacy pilot sites, with priority given to sites in rural and underserved locations. Six pilot sites were enrolled in the project. Enrollment dates varied, but from time of enrollment through May 2023, VaxChamps were expected to dedicate five hours per week to vaccine-related tasks, using the skills from their training.



Map displaying VaxChamp community pharmacy pilot sites in ND

VaxChamp training covered NDIIS access, use of the vaccine forecaster tool, proper vaccine storage, and billing. Sites received additional reference materials, including sample workflows and vaccine information resources. Monthly 30-minute virtual coaching calls offered ongoing support and fostered idea sharing among VaxChamps.

Pharmacists-In-Charge (PICs) and VaxChamps completed pre-post surveys. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with VaxChamps at the project's outset. Exit interviews with both VaxChamps and PICs supplemented survey data and provided participants the opportunity to reflect on their experiences. The four core principles of the CAP Center provided a helpful framework for making a complete project.

RESULTS

Quantitative data provided an overview of each pharmacy's vaccination trends throughout the project. Several (3 of 6) sites introduced new vaccines, including Hepatitis B, meningitis, and tetanus. Data showed a decrease in COVID-19 vaccinations administered, which aligns with national trends. Notably, pneumococcal vaccinations increased by 42.5% (54 to 77), despite moving from a two-dose vaccination series to a one-dose option.

In interviews, both PICs and VaxChamps agreed pharmacies should play a key role in increasing community vaccination rates but cited lack of time as the biggest barrier to doing so. Other barriers included patient hesitancy to be vaccinated and lack of adequate reimbursement. However, pharmacy staff consistently cited pharmacies' accessibility and frequency of patient contact as facilitators.

Some people still don't realize they **can get vaccines at the pharmacy**. They think they have to go to their doctor and have a nurse visit for every vaccine.

(Andrea, VaxChamp)

Pre-post technician surveys showed improved job satisfaction (median value on a 5-point Likert scale increased from 3.5 to 4.4; n=6). Interviews revealed the varied roles technicians play in the immunization process, from prospective screening to billing. Of note, while technicians can now administer vaccines, none were identified as their pharmacy's primary vaccine administrators. Nevertheless, all participated in immunization-related activities, including patient screening, outreach, documentation, and billing.

DISCUSSION

Data revealed varying vaccination rates among pharmacies, which may be influenced by external factors such as geographic location, patient demographics, and community vaccine awareness. This variation underscores the importance of tailoring vaccination strategies to individual pharmacies and their communities.

The increase in technician job satisfaction is encouraging. Engaging technicians in expanded roles can benefit patient care and enhance their professional identity. Despite their capacity to administer vaccines, technicians did not identify as primary vaccine administrators. This may indicate the need for clarifying technician roles in immunizations to extend to all aspects of the process.

Participants identified lack of time as a barrier to devoting more resources to immunization, highlighting the importance of efficient workflow integration and resource allocation. Addressing this challenge may require further research and tailored strategies to streamline vaccine-related tasks.

I feel like we could **do twice as many flu shots** [with technicians who are certified to immunize], have the **technicians out there just rockin' and rollin'**.

(Brett, Owner/PIC)

NEXT STEPS

While the small number of participating pharmacies prevents us from drawing any generalizations, our mixed methods approach yields insight into the unique challenges influencing new service implementation within community pharmacies. Overall, the VaxChamp model holds promise in community pharmacies for enhancing vaccination efforts through prospective patient screening and expanding technician roles.

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CITATIONS

- Wanner H, Hursman A, Rubinstein E. Implementation of a VaxChamp in the Community Pharmacy Setting. Poster presentation at: North Dakota Nurses Association Research Conference. Fargo, ND. October 2023.
- Hursman A, Wanner H, Rubinstein E. Implementation of a VaxChamp in the Community Pharmacy Setting. Poster presentation at: Dakota Conference on Rural and Public Health. Bismarck, ND. June 2023.
- Wanner H, Hursman A, Rubinstein E. Implementation of a VaxChamp in the Community Pharmacy Setting. Poster presentation at: North Dakota Annual Pharmacy Convention. Minot, ND. April 2023.
- Hursman A, Wanner H, Rubinstein E. Implementation of a VaxChamp in the Community Pharmacy Setting. Poster presentation at: American Pharmacists Association Annual Convention. Phoenix, AZ. March 2023.

