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Pharmacists as Frontline Defenders Against Antibiotic Resistance: Insights From Tuberculosis Epidemics

Mohammad Kudish Naser Al Kudish[1], Khalid Mohammed Alqurayshah[2], Talal Mohammed Al Anazi[3], Dhafer Mohamad Alamry[4], Abed Marzouq Alotaibi[5], Saad Abdulathim Alzahrani[6], Mousa Helal Alotaibi[7], Majed Thabet Almotari[8]

1. *Pharmacy Technician Najran General Hospital- Old Najran*
2. *Pharmacy King Khaled Hospital Najran*
3. *Pharmacist Asttant Riyadh Ministry Of Health Branch Riyadh*
4. *Pharmacy Technician Taif Health Cluster Taif*
5. *Pharm.D (Pharmacist) King Abdulaziz Specialist Hospital Taif*
6. *Pharmacist King Abdulaziz Specialist Hospital Taif*
7. *Pharmacy Technician King Abdulaziz Specialist Hospital Taif*
8. *King Fahad Hospital Specialist Pharmacy Technician Tabuk*

Abstract
Antibiotic resistance remains one of the most critical threats to global health, driven by the misuse and overuse of antibiotics across healthcare and agricultural sectors. This literature review highlights the pivotal role pharmacists play in combating antibiotic resistance, particularly through antimicrobial stewardship programs (ASPs) and targeted interventions. Drawing on examples from multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) epidemics and healthcare-acquired resistant infections, pharmacists contribute by optimizing antibiotic prescribing, educating patients and providers, and leveraging innovative technologies to monitor and enforce adherence to treatment regimens. Pharmacist-led initiatives have been shown to improve compliance with guidelines, reduce inappropriate antibiotic use, and enhance clinical outcomes, particularly in resource-limited settings where healthcare infrastructure is constrained. The review also underscores pharmacists' expanding roles in technological advancements, including therapeutic drug monitoring (TDM), decision-support systems, and telehealth, which facilitate real-time interventions and personalized treatment plans. By bridging knowledge gaps, fostering rational prescribing practices, and championing patient education, pharmacists serve as frontline defenders against the escalating crisis of antibiotic resistance.
Keywords; Antibiotic Resistance, Pharmacists, Antimicrobial Stewardship Programs (ASPs), Multidrug-Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB), Therapeutic Drug Monitoring (TDM).

Introduction

Antibiotic resistance has a long and complex history that traces back to the discovery and use of antibiotics. In 1928, Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin, the world's first antibiotic, revolutionizing medicine by providing a powerful tool to treat bacterial infections **(Mohr, 2016)**. However, Fleming himself warned in 1945 that misuse of antibiotics could lead to resistance, highlighting that bacteria could evolve mechanisms to survive treatment **(Levy, 2013)**. This prediction was realized when penicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus strains were reported in hospitals just a few years after its widespread use in the 1940s **(Harkins et al., 2017)**. The phenomenon of antibiotic resistance intensified in subsequent decades as new antibiotics were developed and used, with bacteria like Mycobacterium tuberculosis, Escherichia coli, and Pseudomonas aeruginosa quickly adapting to evade these treatments. The acceleration of antibiotic resistance is largely attributed to overuse and misuse of antibiotics in human medicine, agriculture, and livestock. In the 1950s and 1960s, antibiotics became readily available, often used indiscriminately without proper prescriptions or dosages, especially in developing countries **(Podolsky, 2015)**. This widespread use created selective pressure on bacteria, favoring the survival of resistant strains. By the 1970s, methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) became a major concern in healthcare settings, signaling the growing threat of drug-resistant infections **(Harkins et al., 2017)**. Over time, bacteria developed increasingly sophisticated resistance mechanisms, including the production of enzymes like beta-lactamases that break down antibiotics, alterations to their cellular targets, and the ability to pump antibiotics out of their cells **(Dowling et al., 2017)**. Globalization and inadequate infection control further facilitated the spread of resistant bacteria, turning antibiotic resistance into a worldwide health crisis that continues to escalate today.

Antibiotic-resistant bacteria pose significant challenges to global healthcare systems, with pathogens like Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), Carbapenem-Resistant Enterobacteriaceae (CRE), Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococcus (VRE), Multidrug-Resistant Mycobacterium tuberculosis (MDR-TB), and Pseudomonas aeruginosa leading the charge (Terreni et al., 2021). Each of these organisms exemplifies the growing threat of resistance, requiring sophisticated interventions to manage infections effectively. Pharmacists play a pivotal role in combating these pathogens through antimicrobial stewardship. For instance, in cases of MRSA, pharmacists collaborate with physicians to optimize the use of drugs like vancomycin and linezolid, ensuring accurate dosing to curb resistance (Woolever et al., 2022). Collaborative physician-pharmacist partnerships, such as those outlined by Klepser et al. (2015), reduce unnecessary antibiotic use in MRSA cases through evidence-based protocols (Klepser et al., 2015). Similarly, they provide critical oversight in managing CRE by monitoring the use of last-resort antibiotics and advising on infection control strategies to prevent further spread. Pharmacists also educate healthcare providers on infection control measures to prevent the spread of CRE. Partridge et al. (2018) highlight the role of pharmacists in controlling mobile genetic elements, such as plasmids, that contribute to CRE resistance (Partridge et al., 2018).

Pharmacists also address resistance challenges in VRE, and Pseudomonas aeruginosa by tailoring treatment regimens, promoting the judicious use of advanced antibiotics, and educating healthcare teams on best practices **(Karunarathna et al., 2024)**. For VRE, they guide therapy de-escalation based on susceptibility profiles **(Ibrahim et al., 2001)**, and oversee antibiotic stewardship programs that promote the use of daptomycin and linezolid, reserving vancomycin for appropriate indications. They also play a pivotal role in reducing resistance by advising on de-escalation of therapy once susceptibilities are known **(Munita & Arias, 2016)**. In tackling multidrug-resistant Pseudomonas, pharmacists recommend combination therapies and oversee the careful use of broad-spectrum antibiotics to preserve their efficacy **(Sahoo, 2024)**. Pharmacist-led interventions have been shown to reduce the misuse of broad-spectrum antibiotics, preserving their efficacy **(Richardson, 2017)**. These efforts highlight the indispensable role pharmacists play in mitigating antibiotic resistance. By leveraging their expertise, they ensure the continued effectiveness of treatment strategies while minimizing the emergence and spread of resistance across diverse pathogens.

Multidrug-Resistant Mycobacterium tuberculosis (MDR-TB), resistant to isoniazid and rifampin, presents unique challenges in global TB control **(Seung et al., 2015)**. Pharmacists are instrumental in designing patient-specific regimens using newer drugs like bedaquiline and delamanid **(Saati et al., 2021)**. They ensure adherence to treatment protocols with newer agents like bedaquiline **(Cernasev et al., 2024)**. They also ensure adherence to directly observed treatment programs and monitor for adverse effects, reducing the likelihood of additional resistance. Sengupta et al. (2013) emphasize pharmacists' role in addressing resistance in natural and clinical settings **(Sengupta et al., 2013)**. Pharmacists' contributions are even more critical in resource-limited settings, where healthcare infrastructure is strained. In such contexts, they manage drug inventories to prevent shortages and ensure access to essential antibiotics. Additionally, pharmacists are instrumental in educating patients and healthcare workers on TB prevention and treatment strategies, bridging gaps in public health knowledge **(Pradipta et al., 2022)**. By promoting adherence to TB regimens, pharmacists help prevent the emergence of resistance in settings where healthcare access is inconsistent **(Awad et al., 2024)**.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the critical role of pharmacists in combating antibiotic resistance with a particular focus on multidrug-resistant infections, such as tuberculosis (MDR-TB). It also seeks to highlight the contributions of pharmacists in optimizing antibiotic use, improving adherence to treatment regimens, and leveraging innovative technologies to mitigate the spread of resistance, particularly in resource-limited settings and healthcare environments.

1. Pharmacists' Role in Addressing Antibiotic Resistance

Educating Patients: Promoting Rational Antibiotic Use

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) poses a dire global health threat, with the rise of multidrug-resistant (MDR) and extensively drug-resistant (XDR) tuberculosis (TB) exemplifying its challenges **(Seung et al., 2015)**. Pharmacists, as frontline healthcare professionals, are uniquely positioned to combat AMR through antimicrobial stewardship programs (ASPs). Their responsibilities include educating patients on appropriate antibiotic use, counseling healthcare providers on rational prescribing, and overseeing antibiotic regimens to minimize resistance. Evidence highlights the success of pharmacists in reducing inappropriate antibiotic use and mitigating AMR **(Sakeena et al., 2018)**. A cornerstone of antimicrobial stewardship is patient education, where pharmacists play a vital role in ensuring antibiotics are used effectively and only when necessary (Ha et al., 2017). This is particularly critical for TB, where improper medication use often leads to resistance **(Seung et al., 2015)**. For example, directly observed treatment, short-course (DOTS) programs implemented in TB management depend heavily on pharmacists to explain treatment regimens and emphasize the consequences of non-adherence **(Subedi, 2024)**. Studies in resource-limited settings demonstrate that when pharmacists engage with patients directly, adherence improves, reducing the risk of MDR-TB development **(Khan et al., 2024)**.

Pharmacists use diverse educational approaches to address patients' misunderstandings about antibiotics. A study in Pakistan highlighted that community pharmacists educating patients about multidrug-resistant organisms significantly improved knowledge and practices regarding antibiotic use **(Khan et al., 2021)**. Moreover, these pharmacists often advocate against self-medication and promote adherence to prescribed therapies, reducing the likelihood of resistance due to incomplete or incorrect use of antibiotics. Digital interventions also play a growing role in pharmacist-led education. A study from Indonesia demonstrated the effectiveness of video-based educational materials in improving patients' understanding of proper antibiotic use, leading to better adherence and reduced misuse **(Ghozali et al., 2023)**. Similarly, pharmacists in community settings often use brochures and digital platforms to provide targeted educational campaigns on the dangers of overuse and resistance, making education accessible even in underserved regions.

Further, pharmacists in hospital environments contribute to patient education through in-depth discussions during therapy. In clinical trials, patients educated by pharmacists demonstrated higher adherence to antibiotic regimens and a better understanding of dosing schedules and potential side effects **(Göktay, 2013)**. Another study revealed that pharmacist-led antibiotic stewardship programs reduced resistance rates by ensuring patients fully understood their treatment protocols and avoided inappropriate antibiotic requests **(Guldur et al., 2024)**. Pharmacist interventions are particularly effective in addressing cultural and social factors influencing antibiotic misuse. Research from China noted that pharmacists working directly with surgical patients improved adherence to prophylactic antibiotic guidelines, reducing unnecessary antibiotic use by 50**%** **(Zhou et al., 2016)**. These findings underscore the importance of involving pharmacists in both direct patient education and broader public health campaigns to promote the rational use of antibiotics. By empowering patients with knowledge, pharmacists play a critical role in the fight against antibiotic resistance.

Counseling Providers on Rational Prescribing

Pharmacists play a critical role in guiding healthcare providers towards rational antibiotic prescribing practices, an essential strategy to combat antimicrobial resistance (AMR). By offering evidence-based recommendations, pharmacists ensure antibiotics are prescribed appropriately and effectively. For instance, cooperative target drug monitoring programs (TDMPs) involving pharmacists and physicians have shown significant improvements in prophylactic antibiotic prescribing. A study conducted in obstetrics and gynecology found that pharmacist-led education sessions increased compliance with recommended antibiotic regimens from 45% to 73%, demonstrating the efficacy of collaborative stewardship efforts **(Michael et al., 1992)**. Pharmacists also contribute to closing knowledge gaps among prescribers by providing targeted training and counseling. In a survey conducted at a tertiary care hospital, physicians reported enhanced awareness about antibiotic rationality after engaging with pharmacist-led educational initiatives. Over 50% of participants acknowledged improved understanding of new antibiotics and the interpretation of culture sensitivity tests, underlining the value of pharmacist-guided interventions **(Remesh et al., 2013)**. Additionally, the creation of antibiotic stewardship programs (ABS) with structured training has strengthened the decision-making capabilities of prescribers in both hospital and outpatient settings **(Peiffer-Smadja, 2012).**

In pediatric wards, where antibiotic misuse is common, pharmacist-led behavioral interventions have yielded notable success. A study in Iraq found that pharmacist counseling reduced the use of broad-spectrum antibiotics like cefotaxime and vancomycin, and led to significant decreases in therapy duration, days of hospitalization, and overall antibiotic costs. This highlights the role of pharmacists in tailoring treatment protocols for vulnerable populations **(Abbas & Al-Metwali, 2023)**. Pharmacists must also address cultural and contextual barriers to rational prescribing. For instance, a study in China demonstrated that prescribers often faced social pressures from patients to overprescribe antibiotics. Through collaborative interventions, pharmacists helped physicians develop strategies to counter these pressures, such as emphasizing non-antibiotic treatments for viral infections **(Liu et al., 2019)**. These findings underscore the importance of pharmacist involvement in developing culturally sensitive strategies for prescribing practices. Pharmacists also drive adherence to national guidelines and institutional policies on antibiotic use. In Indonesia, pharmacist-led initiatives improved compliance with local prescribing guidelines, particularly in community health centers. Training programs for prescribers were associated with a two-fold improvement in rational antibiotic use, highlighting the long-term impact of pharmacist interventions **(Andrajati et al., 2017)**. These programs not only enhance prescribing behaviors but also promote a culture of accountability within healthcare teams.

Pharmacists serve as critical advisors to physicians, ensuring that antibiotics are prescribed judiciously. This role is particularly evident in managing drug-resistant TB, where combinations of antibiotics must be tailored to avoid further resistance **(Liebenberg et al., 2022)**. Pharmacists analyze drug susceptibility profiles and provide recommendations on effective regimens, as seen in stewardship programs across developing nations **(Kireyev et al., 2023)**. This collaboration ensures that newer and more effective antibiotics, such as bedaquiline, are used appropriately without risking resistance through overuse.

Monitoring Prescriptions to Mitigate Resistance

A proactive aspect of stewardship involves pharmacists conducting retrospective audits of antibiotic prescriptions. This ensures compliance with treatment protocols and identifies patterns of misuse. For instance, pharmacists routinely review prescription data to detect inappropriate use of second-line TB drugs, which are critical for managing MDR-TB. In many hospitals, pharmacist-led audits have been linked to reduced prescription errors and improved patient outcomes **(Zawahir et al., 2023)**. Pharmacists play a crucial role in the management of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB). By employing therapeutic drug monitoring (TDM) and other patient-centered interventions, pharmacists optimize treatment outcomes and reduce the likelihood of resistance development. TDM is a standard clinical technique that measures plasma drug concentrations to tailor TB regimens, ensuring that patients achieve effective drug exposure while minimizing toxicity **(Alsultan & Peloquin, 2014)**. TDM enables pharmacists to make informed adjustments to TB regimens, particularly for second-line drugs used in MDR-TB treatment. A study conducted in the Netherlands highlighted the implementation of individualized TDM to adjust doses of drugs such as linezolid, amikacin, and bedaquiline. This approach resulted in an 86% success rate among 104 patients with MDR-TB, underscoring the effectiveness of pharmacist-led TDM programs **(Bolhuis et al., 2016)**. Moreover, tools like dried blood spot (DBS) analysis and limited sampling strategies have facilitated the use of TDM in resource-constrained settings, making it more accessible **(Bossi et al., 2024)**. Pharmacists also monitor for drug-drug interactions and ensure adherence to complex MDR-TB regimens. A study in Virginia demonstrated that pharmacists using TDM identified pharmacokinetic variability in 80% of patients, leading to improved dosing and better treatment outcomes **(Heysell et al., 2015)**. In clinical settings, pharmacists employ real-time monitoring of MDR-TB therapy to assess drug absorption and efficacy. For instance, a study in Taiwan revealed that delayed absorption and subtherapeutic levels of cycloserine were common among MDR-TB patients. Pharmacist interventions, including dose adjustments and monitoring, ensured that therapeutic concentrations were achieved, reducing the risk of resistance **(Hung et al., 2014)**. Additionally, pharmacists play an integral role in identifying issues such as delayed culture conversion, which can indicate suboptimal drug exposure or malabsorption **(Holtz et al., 2006)**.

Combatting Hospital-Acquired Resistance

On the other hand, hospitals are regarded as the hotspots for antibiotic misuse, often leading to resistant infections **(Kunhikannan et al., 2021)**. Pharmacists play a central role in implementing hospital-based ASPs that enforce rational antibiotic use. Their duties include developing treatment guidelines, monitoring for drug interactions, and managing adverse effects associated with regimens (Tang et al., 2020). Studies indicate that when pharmacists are actively involved in stewardship efforts, hospital-acquired infections decrease significantly. Their roles extend to conducting prospective audits of antibiotic use, providing feedback to prescribers, and participating in multidisciplinary teams to evaluate and improve prescribing patterns **(Dighriri et al., 2023)**. Evidence from a study by Dustin Waters (2015) shows that a pharmacist-led ASP in a 325-bed hospital resulted in a 91.8% acceptance rate of pharmacist interventions, reducing inappropriate antibiotic use and saving approximately $355,000 annually **(Dustin Waters, 2015)**. Furthermore, pharmacists are instrumental in reducing hospital-acquired infections (HAIs) by overseeing the judicious use of antimicrobials and ensuring compliance with infection control protocols. For instance, pharmacist-driven programs have successfully reduced Clostridioides difficile infections (CDIs) and healthcare-associated pneumonia through targeted antibiotic stewardship **(Malani et al., 2013)**. Studies also demonstrate that employing pharmacists in ASPs decreases the length of stay and mortality associated with resistant infections. In hospitals, pharmacists educate healthcare staff and patients on the importance of antibiotic stewardship and the risks of resistance. Their involvement in multidisciplinary teams ensures that interventions are evidence-based and effectively communicated. For example, a study in Singapore revealed that pharmacists acted as educators, providing tailored advice to patients and prescribers, significantly enhancing the impact of ASPs **(Wong et al., 2021)**.

Emergency departments (EDs) are critical points for initial antibiotic prescribing, often under high-pressure conditions. Pharmacists embedded in EDs play a significant role in ensuring guideline-concordant empiric therapy for conditions such as community-acquired pneumonia (CAP) and intra-abdominal infections. A study demonstrated that having a pharmacist present in the ED improved appropriate antibiotic prescribing by 78% and increased adherence to established ASP protocols **(Kulwicki et al., 2019)**. Pharmacists also involved in pediatric ASPs conduct comprehensive reviews of antibiotic prescriptions and collaborate with hospitalists to ensure optimal therapy. A 5-year retrospective analysis highlighted how pharmacist-led interventions in pediatric ASPs reduced antibiotic misuse and maintained safe care standards **(McCulloh et al., 2015)**. Generally, by strengthening the presence of pharmacists in diverse hospital settings, ASPs can effectively tackle the complexities of antibiotic resistance and ensure better health outcomes.

2. **Leveraging Technology for Stewardship**

Pharmacists increasingly use technology to enhance antimicrobial stewardship efforts. Electronic prescribing systems enable pharmacists to flag inappropriate antibiotic use in real time, ensuring compliance with guidelines. Additionally, digital tools are invaluable for tracking patient adherence to TB regimens, particularly in DOTS programs **(Subbaraman et al., 2018)**. These innovations empower pharmacists to intervene swiftly, preventing the progression of AMR **(Padayatchi et al., 2016)**. They leverage technology in antimicrobial stewardship programs (ASPs) to manage antibiotic resistance in tuberculosis (TB) by integrating digital tools that streamline the monitoring and evaluation of treatment regimens **(Otieno et al., 2022)**. Electronic health records (EHRs) and prescription monitoring systems enable pharmacists to track patient adherence to TB medications, assess drug interactions, and flag inappropriate use **(Murthi et al., 2024)**. These systems provide real-time data, allowing pharmacists to promptly intervene if patients deviate from prescribed regimens. For instance, EHRs can be configured to alert pharmacists when patients on TB treatment miss doses, reducing the likelihood of developing multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) **(Fielding et al., 2023)**.

Advanced decision-support systems (DSS) empower pharmacists to tailor therapies based on patient-specific factors. These platforms analyze patient data, including age, weight, comorbidities, and bacterial resistance profiles, to recommend optimal treatment combinations **(Marques et al., 2024)**. For example, DSS tools can suggest the most effective drug regimen for patients with MDR-TB or extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB), minimizing the trial-and-error approach often associated with managing resistant strains **(Wannheden, 2014)**. These systems also guide pharmacists in adjusting dosages to maximize efficacy while mitigating side effects, ensuring adherence and better outcomes. Another use of technology in this field is telehealth. Telehealth technology extends pharmacists' reach to patients in remote or underserved areas, ensuring continuity of care in TB treatment. Video consultations allow pharmacists to conduct virtual directly observed therapy (vDOT), where they monitor patients taking their medication in real time. This approach not only enhances adherence but also reduces costs and logistical barriers associated with in-person visits. Remote monitoring platforms can also track side effects or adverse reactions to TB medications, enabling timely adjustments to treatment plans and preventing resistance from incomplete therapy **(Wong et l., 2023).**

Moreover, Artificial intelligence (AI) tools aid pharmacists in interpreting diagnostic results, accelerating the identification of drug-resistant TB strains. AI-powered platforms analyze molecular and genetic data from sputum samples to detect mutations associated with resistance to first- and second-line TB drugs **(Jonathan & Barakabitze, 2023)**. Pharmacists use this information to guide clinicians in selecting the most effective treatments. For example, AI algorithms integrated with diagnostic systems like GeneXpert allow for rapid identification of rifampicin-resistant TB, enabling pharmacists to recommend alternative regimens promptly **(Ramachandra et al., 2023).** Pharmacists also use digital platforms to educate themselves and their teams about the latest developments in TB management and resistance patterns. Online databases and mobile applications provide real-time updates on evolving resistance trends, new drugs, and emerging guidelines. These platforms foster evidence-based decision-making, helping pharmacists anticipate resistance challenges and proactively adjust stewardship strategies. By leveraging digital tools to disseminate knowledge and improve communication among healthcare providers, pharmacists can ensure consistent and effective management of TB and its resistant forms **(WHO, 2021)**.

Conclusion

By tailoring interventions to individual patient needs and addressing systemic issues in healthcare delivery, pharmacists play an indispensable role in mitigating the emergence and spread of resistant infections, including multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) and other healthcare-associated infections. Particularly in resource-limited settings, pharmacists bridge critical gaps in education, medication access, and infection control. The findings of this study emphasize the need to integrate pharmacists more comprehensively into public health initiatives and policy frameworks aimed at combating antibiotic resistance. Strengthening their involvement in multidisciplinary teams and expanding access to advanced tools and training can enhance global efforts to curb this escalating threat. Through their expertise and proactive interventions, pharmacists remain vital to safeguarding public health against the looming antibiotic resistance crisis

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