

Feb 6, 2024 - Health

Pharmacies are struggling to refill their own ranks



Tina Reed, author of [Axios Vitals](#)

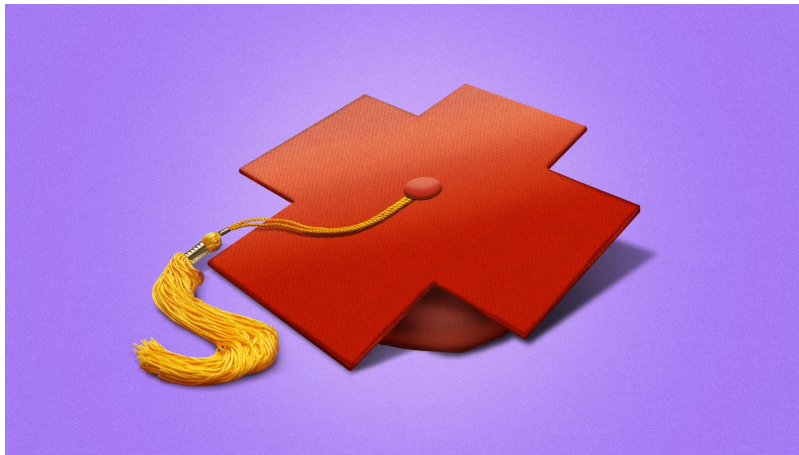


Illustration: Sarah Grillo/Axios

Pharmacy retail chains staking their future on [expanding the health care services](#) they offer are running into a big problem: It's getting harder to draw the next generation of pharmacists amid turmoil in

the industry.

Why it matters: The pharmacies' ambitions to become go-to [providers](#) for vaccinations, patient monitoring and even prescribing are being threatened by workforce shortages and burnout, as well as a flagging talent pipeline from the nation's pharmacy schools.

Driving the news: Walgreens on Monday announced a partnership with pharmacy school deans at 17 universities to better align training with the changing pharmacy business model.

- But the goal is also, in part, to address the industry's image problem.

What they're saying: "We have got to evolve this to get people excited to get back in the industry," Rick Gates, chief pharmacy officer at Walgreens, told Axios.

The big picture: There's been a steady drop in applications to pharmacy schools, falling 64% from nearly 100,000 in 2012 to about 36,000 in 2022, according to the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy.

- In 2022, there were 13,323 graduates from four-year pharmacy programs, down from 14,223 the previous year and the largest drop since 1983, per AACP data.
- Widely publicized staff walkouts in recent months have called attention to increased workload demands that pharmacists [warned](#) are making them more prone to errors.
- There's been a big shift from the time when pharmacists were revered members of their

community, said Frank Harvey, CEO of Surescripts and a pharmacist. Expanding the services that pharmacists provide, while cutting down other workloads, can help restore that respect, he said.

- "We've gone through this 20- or 30- or 40-year span where the pharmacists' job got diluted," he said. "If we could just get it back to what the perception was 50 years ago."
- "We were seen as the doc, you know? I had a ton of my patients who used to call me, 'Doc, can you help me out with this?'"

Zoom in: The University of North Carolina's Eshelman School of Pharmacy, which is part of the new Walgreens initiative, two years ago added more comprehensive education around the business of health care.

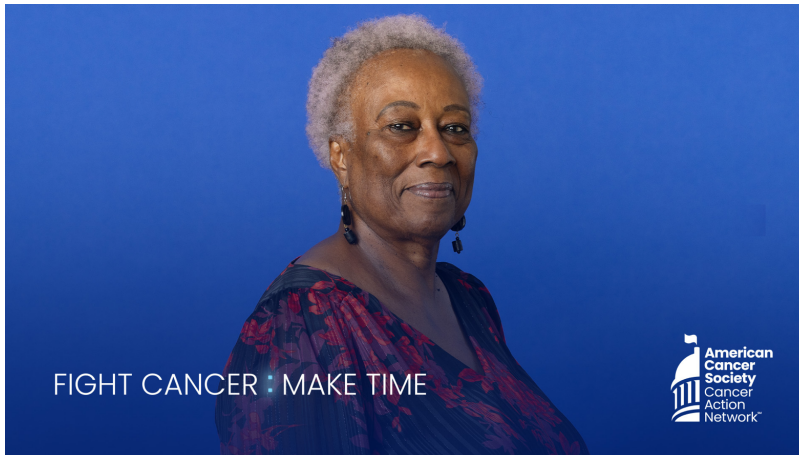
- "They didn't really understand the business of health care in this country. How does a drug get from a manufacturer to a patient?" Angela Kashuba, the school's dean, told Axios.
- It's an example of the kind of updates that need to take place in pharmacy schools, she said.

Between the lines: In response to concerns about overwork, national retailers including Walgreens and CVS Health are trying to streamline and eliminate some tasks by [investing heavily](#) in automation and micro-fulfillment centers where robots do most of the work.

- They've also begun making headway in getting insurers to recognize pharmacies' ability to furnish care amid shortages of other providers and to pay for this work, said Walgreens' Gates.
- The industry's attempts to transform itself, he said, should ultimately help pharmacists prioritize what's usually the most fulfilling part of their job — helping patients.



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Erin Doherty

Updated 34 mins ago - Politics & Policy

RFK Jr. apologizes to family after Super Bowl ad

Screenshot: American Values 2024

[Robert F. Kennedy Jr.](#) apologized to his family Sunday night after a super PAC backing his presidential bid ran a [Super Bowl](#) ad that [mirrored](#) a 1960 [presidential](#) campaign ad for his uncle, former President John F. Kennedy.

Why it matters: The ad was an extraordinarily expensive investment and generated online buzz for the long-shot presidential candidate who is seeking to boost his national name recognition.

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Jason Millman
1 hour ago - Health

Pharma showed up for the big game

Illustration: Maura Losch/Axios

[Menopause](#) is in, toenail fungus is out.

The big picture: A 60-second ad for Astellas' new menopause treatment for hot flashes aired just before Super Bowl kickoff yesterday, while Pfizer had some of history's greatest scientists rocking out to Queen to promote [its cancer work](#).

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Emily Peck, author of [Axios Markets](#)
2 hours ago - Economy

Why rate cuts won't make buying a house much easier

Illustration: Shoshana Gordon/Axios

Interest [rate](#) cuts, now expected to [happen this summer](#), won't solve the housing affordability crisis — in fact, prices may rise when rates come down.

Why it matters: High mortgage rates have pushed up the cost of financing a home, and constrained the supply — some lawmakers are even [urging](#) Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell to lower rates to improve housing affordability.

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