Few people understand exactly what role wholesale distributors play in the pharmaceutical supply chain, often confusing them with manufacturers, pharmacy benefit managers or even pharmacists. Just like the wholesale distributor who helps keep your grocery store shelves stocked with many different food brands, pharmaceutical distributors work with large numbers of suppliers (in this case pharmaceutical manufacturers) to ensure that their products (medicines) are safely, securely and reliably delivered to their ultimate destination — such as a state and federally licensed pharmacy, hospital or long-term care facility.

The distributors’ role is important because it creates far greater efficiency for those ordering medicines. Imagine if every pharmacy and hospital in America had to maintain relationships with every pharmaceutical manufacturer and order separately for each medicine they needed. Not only would that add tremendous time and cost, but it would be virtually impossible to manage inventory and guard against shortages.

This system works remarkably well. Every day, distributors deliver medicines to more than 200,000 healthcare providers and pharmacies, and America has the safest and most secure pharmaceutical supply chain in the world. People do not need to worry about going to a pharmacy and receiving a counterfeit medicine or not being able to find the medicine they were prescribed.

However, there are a few things distributors do not do. As logistics experts, distributors do not manufacture, prescribe or promote medicines. Distributors also do not make clinical decisions as to who should or should not receive a medicine or what medicine is best for a particular patient. Getting a medicine starts with a prescription, and distributors help make sure that what your healthcare provider prescribes gets to your hospital, pharmacy or other healthcare facility safely, securely and reliably.

To learn more about how the pharmaceutical supply chain works, visit: www.hda.org/OurRole