

Storm Clouds on the Horizon: The Future of Hospital Pharmacy Management

Neil J. MacKinnon, Sharon Clark, and Karen J. McCaffrey

Although the picture is far from complete, there are signs that hospital pharmacy management is approaching a state of crisis in Canada. Various authors have documented the shortage of hospital pharmacists¹ and gaps in the managerial competencies of hospital pharmacy directors² and health service executives.³ A survey of 254 Canadian pharmacy directors² revealed that many managers in rural hospitals feel overwhelmed and unable to sufficiently utilize their managerial skills, that the work environment has had a negative impact on morale, that difficulties in recruitment and retention have had a negative impact on departments of pharmacy, and that directors perceive a need for more management training. A recent study confirmed that there are also gaps in the training of US health-system pharmacy managers.⁴

These problems exist in an environment where few, if any, formal pharmacy-specific leadership training options are available and where hospital pharmacy directors have witnessed an increase in their responsibilities because of high drug expenditures and demands for safe medication-use systems. The storm flag was raised for our profession with the recent appointments of nonpharmacists to several directors' positions across the country, when pharmacists were unavailable, unable, or unwilling to step into leadership positions. This situation has stimulated lively debate across the country about what level of "director" positions should be filled by pharmacists. A recent editorial even advocated the need for a chief pharmacy officer (CPO) within health care systems.⁵ Regardless of one's personal view in this debate, there seems to be consensus that our profession needs leaders and strong managers in every area and at every level of hospital pharmacy practice.

CSHP's affirmation of the importance of pharmacy managers through the Society's new position statement entitled "The Role of the Pharmacist as Head of Hospital Pharmacy Services", published elsewhere in this issue,⁶ is

a good first step to further opening the debate. An ad hoc working group (which included two of the authors of this editorial) coordinated the development of this position statement, the need for which would probably have been unthinkable just a short time ago. The members of the working group recognize that the statement could be perceived as self-serving to the profession of pharmacy; however, we believe that it is in the best interests of all stakeholders — physicians, pharmacists, other health care professionals, hospital executives, and especially patients — that Canada's hospital pharmacy departments have strong leadership and that such leadership should be provided by licensed pharmacists. Why would pharmacist leaders be less valued in a hospital organization that would never consider hiring a nonphysician as a medical chief of staff or a non-nurse as chief nursing officer?

A second encouraging sign is that, although pharmacy management has traditionally been an understudied area, the situation is changing. Both the Listening for Direction II initiative of the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation⁷ and the strategic plan of the Institute of Health Services and Policy Research⁸ (one of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research [CIHR]) have much to say about research in health care management. CIHR funded a workshop held during CSHP's annual general meeting in August 2005 to develop strategies and solutions related to recruitment and retention of hospital pharmacy managers. The recommendations from this workshop will be released soon.

Yet efforts are needed in other areas as well. For example, academics and current hospital pharmacy directors should promote hospital pharmacy management as an appealing career choice. Hospital pharmacy residencies and advanced clinical degrees have been available to pharmacists who want to further their clinical pharmacy skills. Future pharmacist leaders need similar educational opportunities.

Strong hospital pharmacy leaders are critical to the future of hospital pharmacy in Canada. Zilz and others⁹ put it this way: “What distinguishes pharmacy departments from one another? We believe that a sustained synergy exists between leadership and high-performance pharmacy practice.”

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Neil J. MacKinnon, PhD, RPh, is Associate Director of Research and Associate Professor, College of Pharmacy, and Associate Professor, Department of Community Health and Epidemiology and School of Health Services Administration, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Sharon Clark, BSc(Pharm), ACPR, RPh, is a Pharmacy Operations Manager with the Fraser Health Authority in British Columbia.

Karen J. McCaffrey, BSc, MHSA, was, at the time of writing, a Dalhousie University/Pfizer Research Fellow in Health Outcomes Management, College of Pharmacy, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. She is now with the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland.

Address correspondence to:

Dr Neil J. MacKinnon
Dalhousie University College of Pharmacy
5968 College Street
Halifax NS
B3H 3J5

e-mail: neil.mackinnon@dal.ca