

Practice Spotlight: Pharmacists of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

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The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), a Pan American Health Organization and World Health Organization Collaborating Centre, was created 10 years ago through the merger of the Addiction Research Foundation, the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, the Queen Street Mental Health Centre, and the Donwood Institute. The centre, which is fully affiliated with the University of Toronto, is Canada's leading addictions and mental health teaching hospital and research and training facility.

One in 5 Canadians, a total of about 6 million people, will suffer from a mental health problem or addiction sometime in their lives.¹ Yet only 32% of these people will seek professional help.² Despite the prevalence of these problems, discrimination and stigma persist.¹ Pharmacists can play a major service and education role in this field, thereby helping to reduce the stigma.

The department of pharmaceutical services at CAMH, which integrates services from the centre's 4 sites, employs about 30 pharmacists with expertise in addictions and mental health. These pharmacists provide a range of clinical and medication management services and also play an important role in the education and training of students, hospital staff, clients, and the general public. Many pharmacists at CAMH lecture at the Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Toronto, and they are often called upon to serve as speakers at external conferences and within CAMH for educational and training initiatives. In addition, pharmacists may participate in policy development and dissemination and in research.

At CAMH, a variety of specialty positions are available, such as the drug information and drug use evaluation pharmacist (who provides drug information to physicians, nurses, clients, families, other care providers, external agencies, other hospitals, community pharmacists, the public, the media, and other stakeholders), the medication safety pharmacist, the informatics pharmacist, and the advanced practice pharmacist (PharmD designation), who provides clinical leadership.

CAMH pharmacists work within multidisciplinary health teams (which also include, among others, psychiatrists, other physicians, nurses, occupational therapists, social workers, dietitians, and recreational therapists) and the patient population. On a typical day, a pharmacist might attend meetings of the interdisciplinary team, perform medication reconciliation, and educate clients about their medications. Each pharmacist is responsible for one or more units with unique patient populations. Colette Raphael cares mostly for clients with schizophrenia, a disturbance of the brain's functioning that can negatively affect the ways in which people think, feel, and relate to others. Erin Fedoruk focuses on the forensic population, clients who have a mental illness and who have come into contact with the law.

Second-generation antipsychotic medications have been implicated in metabolic health problems.³ In response, a centre-wide tool has been designed to monitor clients who are taking these medications, to allow early intervention if problems arise. Pharmacists at CAMH are responsible for initiating use of the tool for any client who is taking a second-generation antipsychotic or when a change is made from one such drug to another. The pharmacist then collaborates with the general practitioner and the nursing staff to enter information about the patient (including laboratory data, other measurements, and the medical history) into the tool, which then calculates a score; this score helps in determining if the client has metabolic syndrome or is at risk for this condition.



When it comes to taking medication regularly, compliance is often a concern, but it can be even more challenging in the mental health setting, where clients often do not have insight into their illness and therefore do not understand why they need to take a medication. To improve compliance, pharmacists at CAMH lead patient medication groups within their respective units (at a frequency of once a week to once a month, depending on the patient population and its needs). During the group sessions, the pharmacist generally provides information on medication, but the sessions may also focus on lifestyle issues such as sun protection and safe sex.

CAMH pharmacists are recognized locally, nationally, and internationally for their expertise and experience and are often called upon to act as resource persons. Working at CAMH is fulfilling and rewarding, allows the pharmacists to enhance their clinical skills within an interprofessional environment and to expand their scope of practice, and provides collaborative practice opportunities.

References

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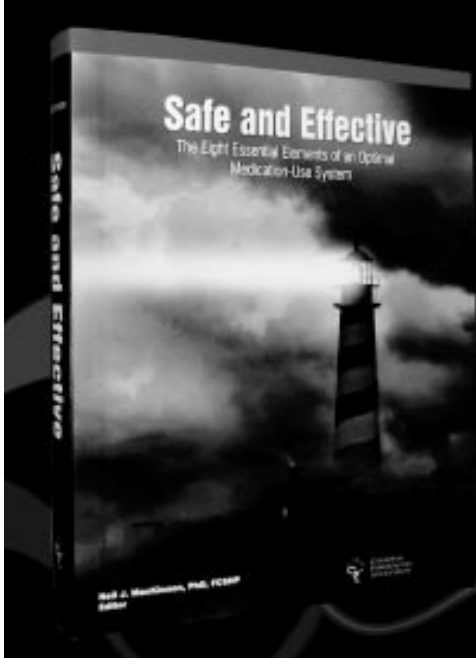
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