

Pharmacy In Canada: Focus On Patient Care

Alim Kotadia*,

2nd Year B.Sc. Pharmacy (University of Saskatchewan, Canada)

Canada, a vast country situated between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, is often referred to as a "cultural mosaic," that is, a land made up of people from many different cultures, religions, and ethnicities. This diversity is what makes Canada a unique country because diversity is the foundation of some of Canada's fundamental values: respect, pluralism, and equality. The Canadian health care system reflects these values by providing free health care to all Canadians and by working towards equal access and equal quality in services provided across the country; pharmacists play a vital role in the delivery of these services. Although Canada is a relatively young country, it has made great advances in the area of health care and specifically, in the field of pharmacy.

Canadian pharmacists today enjoy a high degree of public trust and respect, which is reflected in their high salaries compared to the average person (pharmacy graduates can expect to make about \$100,000 or Rs 41,00,000 annually). However, much like India today, pharmacists have had to face many challenges associated with the development of the profession including creation of an identity, integration into the health care team and defining the role of - and services provided by - pharmacists. Like countries all over the world, the role of the pharmacist in Canadian health care has progressed from simply compounding and dispensing medications to providing patient-focused pharmaceutical care.

Pharmacists in Canada occupy a crucial role in the health care system; pharmacists are often the first point of contact for many patients and given the increasing demand and limited supply of doctors in Canada, this trend will continue. Canadian pharmacists work in a wide variety of areas such as community pharmacy, hospital pharmacy (requires a 1 year specialization program after the B.Sc. program), industry, marketing, government (dealing with policy, licensing and legislation), research and academia, and most recently, working as a part of health care teams in a clinical setting. As of January 1, 2009, there were 31,384 licensed pharmacists in Canada for a population of about 34 million people, which works out to

one pharmacist for just over 1,000 people. Community pharmacists (the most common type of pharmacists in Canada) are relied upon for their knowledge base and skills not only by patients, but also by other health care professionals.

There are currently over 8,000 community pharmacies and about 300 hospital pharmacies throughout Canada. Pharmacies offer a wide range of services such as product recommendations, patient counselling, blood pressure checks, patient information leaflets and seminars, home delivery, blister packaging, safe disposal of expired medications and used needles, and as of recent, even the prescribing of drugs by qualified pharmacists. To be able to prescribe certain medications, pharmacists must take a course (usually a few months in duration) in a particular area. For example, a pharmacist could take a cardiology-specific course, which would allow them to prescribe specific drugs used in cardiology.

The community pharmacist is not only expected to be knowledgeable in disease states, common ailments and drug products, but also to be able to interact with employees and health care professionals (often with physicians), deal with issues of insurance coverage and exemplify the characteristics of a health care professional: empathy, compassion, understanding, reliability, honesty and trustworthiness.

The education of pharmacists in Canada has traditionally been through a Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy degree (4 years) offered in ten universities across the country, but this degree will soon be combined with the Doctor of Pharmacy degree (PharmD) as is the case in many countries. The focus of the current B.Sc. degree, however, is still the patient. With courses such as patient care, patient counselling and public speaking along with traditional courses such as pharmacology, compounding and pharmacotherapeutics, students are equipped with the skills to carry out pharmaceutical care as well as the knowledge of disease states and drugs.

Patient-centered courses include practical work in laboratories set up like

community pharmacies with actors for patients and even a video recording system so the student can watch him or herself counselling the patient. Specifics of patient counselling such as body language, phrasing of directions, listening skills, eye contact, gestures, tone of voice, and speed of speech are all components which are regularly evaluated and developed with the ultimate goal of better patient care. Mandatory practical experience placements in each year as well as seminars and tutorials throughout the year ensure students have the necessary experience to deal with patients and other health care professionals once they graduate from university. The practical experience placements are particularly important in the Canadian health care system because of the emphasis on insurance and health care coverage. Since every Canadian is covered for the costs of basic medications by the government (approximately 44% of prescription drugs were covered in 2004), and since many Canadians also have insurance through their employers, pharmacists must know how to deal with insurance companies, how to troubleshoot insurance-related problems, and they must know which drugs are generally covered and which drugs the patient must pay for out-of-pocket. Drug costs can be very high and thus knowledge and experience relating to insurance and coverage is essential so that patients do not have to pay too much for their medications. Also, since pharmacies are reimbursed by the government for filling medications, pharmacists must also understand the financial and bookkeeping aspects of pharmacy.

Along with the above mentioned courses, there are also courses dealing with research, ethics and evidence-based medicine, which give pharmacy students the skills to critically analyze new research, news articles and other information pertaining to pharmacy. Pharmacy students are not necessarily expected to know the answer to every question posed to them by patients and health care professionals, but they are expected to know how to find the answer; the process is just as important as the answer.

*akotadia@ualberta.co

The Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns, or CAPSI, is the student body which promotes and advocates the interests of pharmacy students across the country. Many pharmacy students are members of CAPSI and other organizations such as the International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation, the Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) and the Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists (CSHP). These organizations serve to further the profession of pharmacy and by joining them, students gain access to a wealth of knowledge and information, and perhaps most importantly, students get an opportunity to interact with fellow students and established professionals. Pharmacy students and pharmacists must also be familiar with Health Canada and specifically the Drugs and Health Products division, which is responsible for the health and safety of Canadians in the area of medications and is an important source of current drug information, advisories and legislation.

Most recently, Canadian pharmacists have established a "Blueprint for Pharmacy," which is a detailed vision for the profession

of pharmacy in Canada. This vision is centered on the idea of accountability: pharmacists must be accountable for the outcomes of patient care. Through gathering appropriate information, processing that information, developing proper pharmaceutical care plans in collaboration with the patient and other health care professionals, implementing those plans and by following up and evaluating the plans, the pharmacist takes responsibility for the patient. Working together with other health care professionals is also a major goal of the health care system and the "Blueprint for Pharmacy" in Canada.

Starting in school, health care students including pharmacy, medical, nursing, physiotherapy, dentistry and nutrition students work together on inter-professional projects and case studies. Each student has a chance to offer something to the case and through the sharing of ideas, knowledge and skills, students from different professions come to understand and appreciate what the other professions have to offer. This understanding and appreciation then carries over to the workforce where the same

students eventually work together to form an efficient, cohesive team of health care professionals who can all contribute to patient care.

Pharmacy in Canada and the education of pharmacists have evolved over the years and are continuing to evolve. The future is bright for pharmacy across the world and in Canada, with its unique multicultural environment, pharmacists of different backgrounds are coming together to share ideas and knowledge to further the profession. Through the development of a clear vision for pharmacy, changing the focus of the pharmacy education to patient care, and changing the public perception towards the profession, pharmacists in Canada are defining the roles they will play in the health care system in the future.

Canadian Pharmacists Association: <http://www.pharmacists.ca>

Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns: <http://www.capsi.ca>

Health Canada (Drugs and Health Products): <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/>

American Association of Indian Pharmaceutical Scientists AAiPS Distinguished Educator and Researcher Award

Eligibility: Pharmaceutical Faculty in a Recognized Indian Pharmacy Institute

Grant: Up to US \$4000 in Travel and Expenses

Criteria: Outstanding faculty member in the pharmaceutical arena in good standing in India. Individuals who have made significant and consistent contribution to teaching and research in Pharmaceutical Sciences and Technology in a recognized academic institution in India

Guidelines: This grant is fully funded by AAiPS and facilitated by Indian Pharmaceutical Association (IPA) in India.

- a) The grant covers participation at the Annual Meeting of American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists (AAPS), held in November of each year in North America, and covers full registration, travel expenses for a trip to the host city in North America, and possibly visits to an Industrial setting and an academic institution, reasonable lodging and boarding expenses for various activities for a total reimbursable expenses of not more than US \$ 4000.
- b) The nominations for this Grant shall be facilitated by IPA
- c) Application should be submitted electronically to the Executive Secretary of IPA on or before **15th April 2010**.
- d) Application should include the following (**Total package not to exceed 10 pages - longer package will be rejected without consideration**):
 - Outline of significant achievement in pharmaceutical sciences
 - An updated CV
 - Two letters of recommendation
 - A brief abstract of recent original research [see e) below]
- e) Must have done some original research enabling the candidate to make a podium or poster presentation at the AAPS Annual Meeting - A brief abstract of the proposed presentation should also be provided with the application.
- f) On completion of the visit candidates should submit a report within one month to AAiPS and IPA.
- g) Some amount of the grant will be released one month before visit to facilitate travel and remaining after completion of the visit.
- h) This award is available only once to selected candidates.