



Pharmacist on the Front Lines of a Pandemic - Q&A with Anthony Kapelke

Dear Capsule Readers,

I would like to share my experience, as a pharmacy student, working through the complexities of a global pandemic. After completion of our 2nd academic year as PharmD students, we are scheduled to have a 4-week hospital rotation sometime in May or June. I was originally scheduled to be on the cardiology unit at the Royal Alex hospital in May, but due to the severity of COVID-19, that rotation had to be cancelled. As a matter of fact, the faculty had to cancel most of the placements that were slated to start in May, and completely revamp how the 2nd (and 1st year) rotations were going to look. The faculty was so innovative and made accommodations for students in any way they could. This meant allowing students to approach their own preceptors, giving students the opportunity to complete their 2nd year clinical rotation in the community setting, or opening up placement sites that are typically reserved for 4th year students. As placements started getting rescheduled, I was given the latter opportunity, and completed my 4-week clinical rotation at the Edmonton Remand Centre.

This was hands down one of the coolest experiences of my pharmacy school career. Not only did I gain insight into the operations of a remand centre, I got to see how healthcare is implemented in that setting...during a global pandemic to boot! The entire pharmacy team at the ERC is amazing, and it was encouraging to see the steps the entire facility was taking to protect against an outbreak.

Every inmate that came into the facility was swabbed for COVID-19 and assessed for any symptoms. No matter what, even if the patient had zero symptoms and their test came back negative, they had to isolate within a cohort of other inmates that came into the remand centre on the same day. This isolation period lasted 14 days. This meant coordinating time outside of patient cells to limit interactions with different cohorts, and strategically planning when to speak to patients with both acute and chronic medical conditions. Although COVID-19 created some additional barriers and restrictions to the standard workflow, the entire pharmacy staff at the ERC remained positive, encouraging, and did their best to deliver first class patient care.

Before I went on rotation, I was working in the community. We had put up plexiglass at the cash register, implemented extensive cleaning protocols, and restricted the amount of patients allowed in the pharmacy at a time. This disrupted the workflow of the pharmacy, but everyone pulled together to ensure our patients and the pharmacy team remained safe. Although many of our patients spoke about being fed up with the pandemic and all of the inconveniences that come with it (if I had a dollar for every time we asked someone to kindly put on a mask ...) I believe many patients developed a new-found appreciation for us. While the world was put on hold and every profession transitioned to working remotely, pharmacy carried forward and faced the pandemic head on, risking ourselves for the health of our patients.



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I commend all pharmacists working on the frontline, and take immense pride being a part of the pharmacy profession in Alberta. I believe through these tumultuous and troubling times society got to see the true value of pharmacists and pharmacy as a whole. Let's garner this momentum and continue to advocate for ourselves and our valorous profession!

Anthony Kapelke, 3rd year Doctor of Pharmacy Student
President of the Alberta Pharmacy Students' Association