

How does RxA advocate for the pharmacy profession? As a practicing Pharmacist, what will be your role in advocating for the profession? How do you feel you will be able to have an impact?

A quick look at the motto of RxA says, " We Advocate, We Educate, We Support". These words are familiar words used by so many organizations and ministries. But, do the actions match the words? Has RxA done what it says?

Before I start this discussion, I will give a background of the Alberta Pharmacy Association. Alberta Pharmacy Association, with the logo RxA, is a non-for-profit membership organization whose goals include supporting and advancing the profession and providing continuing education for pharmacists. The activities of RxA are governed by a board of directors who are elected and dictate responsibilities related to the organization's priorities and initiatives. For 20 years, the association has been a voice for pharmacists in Alberta, such as ensuring that pharmacists have excellent practice in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.

Generally, pharmacy practice in Canada is a regulated profession and basically involves dispensing, assessing prescriptions for drug therapy problems and other recommendations. On the other hand, the practice in Alberta is unique because it includes all the above functions and more. For instance, the clinical practice of the profession gives pharmacists the widest scope of practice so that they can give the best possible care to patients. Pharmacists are also recognized for their value and are therefore remunerated for their clinical services. Then, come to job satisfaction; pharmacists in Alberta love their job and are adequately remunerated when compared to other provinces. These and much more were made possible by the support of the pharmacy association of Alberta.

The RxA, as one of its core duties, advocates for the pharmacy profession. The word "advocacy", according to the Merriam Webster dictionary is: the act of supporting a cause or a proposal. To further buttress this point, RxA bridges the gap between the pharmacists and the legislative by playing a vital role in policy development and implementation. There are so many of these policies that RxA has achieved and I will make an attempt to discuss them further.

First, on a higher level, that is, at an organizational level, RxA meets with stakeholders locally, provincially and nationally to decide on policies that can impact the profession and how to advance the practice of pharmacists, also how to move the profession forward. An example of this policy enactment is the Pharmacy Services Framework which came into effect on July 1st, 2012. This led to the development of the pharmacy service remuneration. In 2014, RxA also signed an agreement known as the Alberta Blue Cross Agreement, which led to the expanded compensation plan. And most recently, in 2021, with the pandemic hitting the world, the association negotiated with the Government to become the first in Canada to administer the COVID-19 mRNA vaccine to the population.

Another level of advocacy is meeting with elected officials and pharmacists locally through RxA's leadership cohort. Here, pharmacists in different fields of practice at the grassroots raise their voices through representatives in matters that affect them. What this means is that those concerns that affect pharmacists in their individual practice are made known and also ways to uplift the profession is also brought to this group.

Based on an individual level, the association advocates for pharmacists directly and the profession indirectly by educating pharmacists, giving recognitions and awards and providing support to pharmacists. The practice of pharmacy is an evolving profession that requires constant learning and relearning of practices that are no longer relevant. RxA is part of an accreditor of Canadian Council on Continuing Education in Pharmacy (CCCEP), supports new learning in pharmacy and to keep pharmacists updated. Recognizing pharmacists who have distinguished themselves in practice or on other matters is also another way RxA advocates for the profession. When pharmacists are recognized for their works, it creates a chain of excellence in practicing the profession; as pharmacists know that they are rewarded.

Shifting the slide to a personal note, I would ask; how can I make an impact, what will be my role in advocating for the profession? There is no other way to answer this than from the RxA words, " Will you get informed and get involved so that we get going". Change begins inwardly with me by taking the resources provided for me by the association to stay informed; in terms of policies, new learnings on patient centered-care. This will take me to getting involved with my profession. With the challenges faced in the pharmacy in terms of engaging work culture, it takes a lot to be committed to the profession. But, if I do not bring my voice with others by coming together with the association, then how can I advance the profession?

By making a personal commitment to advancing the course of the profession, I would get involved with participating in programs and schemes that will promote the tenets of the profession. As the world advances in many spheres of endeavours, so should our knowledge and good practices evolve. This will definitely resonate in my day-to-day activities as a pharmacist which in turn will translate to a greater outcome in the profession in general.

Alberta has the widest scope of practice in the world. What work has RxA done to achieve this scope and complementary reimbursement model? How will you use your experience to support and practice the profession once licensed?

Before I delve into the achievement of RxA in Alberta, I would like to give a background of pharmacy practice in Canada. Canada is made of many different provinces and territories, and within these jurisdictions, there are different scopes of practice. Generally speaking, in Canada, there are some common duties and responsibilities of Pharmacists such as assessing the appropriateness of prescriptions, dispensing and counselling. Some of the provinces do these basic functions and more like giving injections, vaccinations, etc. But Alberta pharmacists have the widest scope of practice.

Someone would ask, what does it mean to have the widest scope, not just in Alberta but all over the world? This simply means that pharmacists in Alberta can give patients the best possible care when and where they need it most without being restricted. For instance, in some provinces, pharmacists are restricted in duty to only dispensing and counselling medications. You can imagine the frustration of some of these pharmacists when they cannot adapt a prescription because it is not within their scope; and the lack of trust by patients who feel that these pharmacists may not know what to do, to say the least.

In Alberta, pharmacists perform a lot of functions and pharmacists who have additional prescribing authority(APA) can manage ongoing therapy by writing prescriptions, renewing

prescriptions, prescribing in minor ailments and some diagnosed conditions, adapting some medications by making some therapeutic substitutions, ordering lab tests and give vaccinations. I have been able to speak to some colleagues in some provinces, and when I tell them what Pharmacists back here do. They are awed. Jokingly, they will say, "This is not Alberta" when I give a recommendation.

The question I know that will be raised is, "How were we able to achieve all of this? How are we so different from other provinces in practice"? The answer is-Alberta Pharmacists Association(RxA). This is a body of pharmacists represented by an elected board of directors that oversee pharmacy as a profession in Alberta and to ensure it evolves. In particular, I will talk a bit more about one of the body's achievements- the Complementary Reimbursement Model.

The complementary Reimbursement Model is a system where the provincial Government reimburse the pharmacists essentially for the clinical services provided to patients. There are many such services which include a Comprehensive Annual care plan, Standard Medication Management Review, Administration of Drug by Injection, Prescription Adaptation, Immunization, Prescription Renewal, Manage Ongoing Therapy, Refusal to fill, and the list goes on. To break it down, this simply means, once a patient is assessed and determined by the pharmacist that the patient qualifies for any of these services, the pharmacist bills and the Government pays the pharmacist for it. Essentially, these roles performed by the pharmacists are adding value to the healthcare system and decreasing the cost of the healthcare burden.

One may be wondering, where then does the RxA come into all of this? First, the RxA's primary duty is to advocate and support the profession. In other words, the association helps negotiate for some policies that may change the course of practice in Alberta. For instance, in July 2012, the association negotiated the publicly funded Pharmacy Services Framework, which is a patient-focused pharmacy service remuneration framework. Also, in 2014, RxA also signed a negotiation with Alberta Health resulting in the first new Alberta Blue Cross Agreement, making a new compensation plan. All these events were achieved with the actions and support of the association who are also pharmacists. It is also worth noting that these could not have happened without the pharmacists at the grass-root level who know where the shoes hurt the most and then communicated with the association that took it from there.

Having said all these, where do I fit in all of these? As an internationally educated pharmacist, I must say that filling these shoes is quite challenging. For me, impacting the profession means using the available tools to provide the best possible care to patients. The impact of the CCPP has given me the insight of practice in Alberta, and also the broader view of the scope of practice. Having this mindset, I am poised to bring in a practice targeted at ensuring standards and making room for evolving practice.