

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

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the word Advocate means to publicly support or suggest an idea, development, or way of doing something. When it comes to the pharmacy profession, this can be distilled into three primary categories: 1) Political advocacy regarding legislative and regulatory issues; 2) professional advocacy regarding the role of pharmacists in health care; and (3) patient advocacy concerning patients' medication-related needs. Right from its inception in 2000, the Alberta Pharmacists Association served as a voice for pharmacist advocacy in Alberta.

To start off with, RxA advocates for the profession through legislative, regulatory and Public Health policy efforts. This is not an easy feat as it entails knowing and understanding the legislative issues affecting pharmacy and public health. Meeting with elected officials and pharmacists locally through RxA's Leadership Cohort is a good case in point. Meeting with stakeholders locally, provincially, and nationally serve to build onto this as well. These stakeholders include Pharmacy Educators at the University of Alberta, Alberta Health Services, Corporate Pharmacy Leaders, other professional associations, and regulatory bodies representing pharmacists, physicians, and nurses.

Although the essence of what pharmacists do is not premised on Compensation and remuneration but patient-centred care, these are still crucial aspects. To take it back, in 2012, RxA successfully negotiated the publicly funded Pharmacy Services Framework, which turned out to be the benchmark for patient-focused pharmacy service funding. In 2014, RxA was instrumental in the negotiations that resulted in the first new Alberta Blue Cross Agreement for the profession since 2003 and an expanded compensation plan supporting pharmacy service.

Today's rapidly changing healthcare system requires stakeholders in healthcare to evolve and adapt to these dynamic changes. More so for the pharmacy profession as it strives to define its space and utility in this system. One of the foundational pillars to adequately equip pharmacists has to do with their education. From becoming an accredited provider by the Canadian Council on Continuing Education in Pharmacy to developing the Preparing to Apply for Additional Prescribing Authorization course, the RxA has been at the forefront of educating pharmacists. The member-exclusive CCCEP accredited courses, programs and conferences for pharmacists is testimony to this feat.

It goes without saying that the patient is at the center of what we do. Through RxA's engagement, patients got more vaccination coverage for Flu shots and, more recently, Covid 19 mRNA vaccines. So, in addition to advocating for the profession, they ultimately advocate for our patients as well.

As I work on my licensure process, it is not lost on me that I have a responsibility and obligation to act as a leader and advocate within my own practice. Leadership and advocacy are intertwined concepts, with the latter including both legislative and patient responsibilities. My work will have to uphold the patient's right to safe and effective medication. At the minimum, it will be key to be up to date with my therapeutic knowledge and clinical skills. Each patient will be unique, and it will be critical to ensure that patients are achieving their goals of therapy through safe and effective medication use.

I aim to be active in the legislative efforts of our pharmacy organizations for instance, RxA, through personal contact with local legislators. This would provide opportunities to contribute to political action committees to financially support the legislative and lobbying efforts of our provincial and national pharmacy organizations.

To sum it up, to ensure continuity, pharmacists have a responsibility to pass the baton stick to our younger counterparts and students. This means we need to act as role models for younger pharmacists and student pharmacists. They need to see their mentors in action as advocates for our patients and our profession. I am prepared to avail myself as a mentor to those who will walk the same path that I am on.

"If I have seen further," Isaac Newton wrote in a 1675 letter to fellow scientist Robert Hooke, "it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

Alberta has the widest scope of practice in the world. In no more than 1000 words, describe "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?"

In recent years, the scope of pharmacy services has expanded in many Canadian jurisdictions. Each province and territory has taken a different approach to optimize these changes for better health and value. In Alberta, pharmacists have one of the most progressive scopes of practice in North America. They have the authority to prescribe drugs independently, administer drugs by injection, order laboratory tests and, to top it up, access electronic health records. Right from its formation, the Alberta Pharmacists Association has played an integral role in expanding pharmacists' practice and continues to work with government and industry leaders to advocate for excellence in patient care.

A good case in point was the development of the Compensation Plan for Pharmacy Services in Alberta, which involved consideration of various factors within the healthcare system: starting with internal regulatory changes affecting the scope and practice of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, access to patient information and changes in the reimbursement of generic medications. This plan was introduced in July 2012 through negotiations between members of the pharmacy profession and the Alberta Government. RxA, as the advocacy organization for pharmacists, represented Pharmacists. The government included the compensation plan as a

priority initiative to support the expanding role of pharmacists as integral members of the healthcare system.

True to its vision, the RxA identified 5 principles to guide the development of the compensation plan:

- Payment for pharmacy services based on patient assessment within the regulatory framework of the pharmacy profession
- Support for pharmacists in expanding their scope of practice
- Development of long-term relationships with patients
- Expansion of services delivered by pharmacists
- Access to pharmacy services for all Albertans

RxA was instrumental in the implementation of the compensation plan, which began in July 2012, supported by the Alberta Government and Alberta Blue Cross. This entailed communications to both pharmacists and the public through press releases, news conferences and web-based resources. Adding on, RxA facilitated the development of an educational plan to introduce the compensation plan to pharmacists. Up to 30% of Albertan pharmacists participated. To build on this, the RxA continued to offer professional development programs to provide ongoing support for pharmacists applying for Additional Prescribing Authorization and injections authorization, conducting patient assessments, and developing care plans for chronic disease management. This epitomizes what the extended scope of practice is all about.

In 2014, the RxA completed pharmacy agreement negotiations with Alberta Health which resulted in the first new Alberta Blue Cross Agreement for the profession since 2003 and an expanded compensation supporting pharmacy service.

The journey towards licensure has been challenging but full of lessons. It's inspiring to see the work that the RxA has done and what they continue to do in terms of advocating for the profession. It has become clear that my journey is not just about me but our patients and the future of the pharmacy profession. The experience that I will gain when I start practising will have to count for something as far as pushing the profession forward. I have a professional obligation to advocate on behalf of patients and the profession. My plan is to culture the habit of staying informed on issues that affect medication-related outcomes and to advocate on behalf of patients, the profession, and the public. The scope of these issues could include legal, regulatory, financial, and other health policy issues.

Through my work, I aim to promote pharmacist accountability as an integral aspect of pharmacy practice to other healthcare professionals, standards-setting and regulatory organizations, and patients. If I can successfully influence the behaviour of physicians, nurses, pharmacy technicians, interns, support staff and others to optimize medication safety and patient outcomes, I would take that as positively impacting the profession.

Looking at the past 2 years, it would be difficult to come across a community, province or country that is still not reeling from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. When I look back and reflect, it becomes clear that I should begin to think not only about my obligations to individual patients but also about how I may use my training and experience to impact the health of communities or societies. The opioid crisis is still a very relevant public health issue now that brings into focus the question of what my role should be as a pharmacist in resolving this. I foresee myself engaging in promoting population health, developing disease prevention and control programs (including chronic disease or disease treatment programs), engaging in opioid stewardship efforts, including prevention, intervention, and treatment, promoting medication safety efforts and above all, advocating for sound legislation, regulations, and public policy regarding disease prevention and management.

Above all, I will approach the profession with a growth mindset. Even after years of experience, I will take each patient encounter as a learning opportunity, and the same applies to the work that the RxA is doing. I plan to maintain my membership with the organization and volunteer for committees or working groups related to pharmacy advocacy work, as this is the best way to get exposed to issues affecting the profession.