

Advancing the Profession Through Leadership and Advocacy

In my first year of pharmacy school, I noticed only three other Black students in my class. It was clear that Black students were grossly underrepresented in the pharmacy program across all levels, and there was no Black representation in leadership positions such as on the Faculty. Now, the Canadian population is diverse in race, culture, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. Statistics Canada's projection until 2036 indicates that international migration will be the main contributor to population growth in Canada, further increasing our diversity. As pharmacists in Alberta, we pride ourselves on our expanded scope of practice that has provided us with more opportunities to be accessible to patients. So, how do we build trust and advocate our value as pharmacists to communities that do not see themselves reflected in our profession? How do we increase representation and retain pharmacy students and pharmacists from diverse backgrounds if we do not create inclusive environments that will allow them to thrive? These were some of the questions that prompted the creation of the Black Pharmacy Students Association (BPSA). I founded BPSA with other Black students to increase representation, advocate, provide mentorship opportunities and improve health outcomes for our community members.

I served as BPSA's first President and recruited members until almost all Black students had joined the association. In addition, I led the conversation to get the association recognized by the Faculty through different channels, such as promoting the group in faculty publications, promoting our initiatives and consulting with the association on significant changes happening within the Faculty. "Pharmacy School 101" webinar, the first initiative I led with the group, has become an annual event aiming to engage students from minority groups and increase their interest in pursuing the pharmacy profession. Many students who attended this webinar are now in the University of Alberta pharmacy program, and some are BPSA members. I also led the launch of a mentorship circle for prospective and current Black pharmacy students to connect and network with pharmacists in practice. We celebrated the mentorship year with a gala sponsored by the Alberta Pharmacists' Association (RxA) to appreciate mentors and foster a sense of community. In addition, we hosted a COVID-19 vaccine webinar where Black healthcare professionals addressed the community's concerns. We translated COVID-19 vaccine infographics into different African languages and received feedback on how they helped address language barriers and improve vaccine uptake. On the Faculty's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (EDI Committee), I advocated for Black representation on faculty committees, and we now have BPSA members on admissions and curriculum committees. I also advocated for the inclusion of Black health in curriculum and research and participation of faculty members in anti-racism and implicit bias training.

The establishment of BPSA has given Black pharmacy students a sense of ownership and belonging and created a space for them to be their authentic selves. BPSA membership and the executive team expanded by 100%, reflecting the desire of members to assume leadership positions. The initiatives I led served as a foundation for students to take on active roles and see themselves as change leaders within the profession. In addition, the existence of BPSA has enhanced Black engagement through collaboration with other student groups and a dedicated

seat on the Alberta Pharmacy Students' Association (APSA) council to advocate for themselves and their fellow students.

As I transition from a student to a practicing pharmacist, I aim to continue advocating for the profession by leading and creating inclusive spaces for current and prospective pharmacists. I currently serve in an advisory role with BPSA and am highly involved in planning their community initiatives for the upcoming year. These initiatives include promoting mental health and wellness for pharmacy students and a Black community dermatology clinic where we will teach about sun safety, peculiar skin conditions, personal skin care and many more. I plan to utilize my relationships with organizations such as RxA, Black Physicians of Canada, and community-based groups to garner support for initiatives that will improve care for patients belonging to marginalized groups. I recently earned the Alberta College of Pharmacy Leadership Development award, which will allow me to attend a conference that will further grow my leadership skills, improve my knowledge of Black Health, and set me up for success in these initiatives. I am committed to seeing equity thrive, and with these efforts from myself and other leaders within our profession, I aspire to a pharmacy profession with more inclusive pharmacy practices.