

Essay by: Cynthia Mafumhe

Alberta has the widest scope of practice in the world and RxA is recognized by Alberta Health as a representative association for pharmacists in Alberta. In no more than 1000 words, describe how RxA advocates for the profession and what work it has done to achieve this scope and complementary reimbursement model.

Pharmacists in Alberta have one of the most progressive scopes of practice in the world. As the role of pharmacy in healthcare expands, it is imperative that pharmacy professionals work together to advocate for the profession. Over the course of the past two decades, the Alberta Pharmacists Association (RxA) has championed the cause of pharmacists by working to identify, unlock and advance opportunities for them.

At its core, pharmacy advocacy entails actively promoting the positive image and role of pharmacists. RxA has effectively done this through:

- Representing the pharmacy profession in the media, government and the general public
- Utilizing contacts, relationships and events to communicate pharmacy's role to the general public
- Promoting the importance of pharmacists in providing healthcare services
- Developing educational materials and programs to increase public awareness of the profession
- Raising awareness of the availability of quality healthcare services from pharmacists
- Collaborating with other stakeholders and organizations. These include pharmacy educators at the University of Alberta; Alberta Health Services; Corporate pharmacy leaders and other associations and regulatory bodies representing pharmacists, physicians and nurses
- Developing and advocating for policies to improve the potential for pharmacy services
- Identifying key research evidence to support pharmacy practice
- Educating decision makers on the value of pharmacy services
- Meeting regularly with elected officials and pharmacists locally through RxA's Leadership cohort
- Educating pharmacists through member exclusive CCCEP accredited courses, programs and conferences
- Negotiating with the government on behalf of pharmacists resulting in an expansion of scope of practice. As we navigate away from the rocky waters of the Covid-19 pandemic, an instance that comes to mind was when the RxA negotiated with government making Alberta pharmacists the first in Canada to administer Covid-19 mRNA vaccines.

A good case in point that encapsulates the work that RxA does was the development of the compensation plan for pharmacy services in Alberta in 2012. RxA represented pharmacists in negotiations with the Alberta Government. To top this up, once the negotiations were fruitful, they then led the implementation of the compensation plan supported by the Alberta Government, Alberta Blue Cross and other stakeholders. An educational program was developed to introduce the compensation plan and after the initial education period, 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.

As you move forward to become practitioners in Alberta, you will have the responsibility or working in the unique Alberta practice model. In no more than 1000 words, describe how do you plan to utilize your experience to advocate for the profession and make an impact on your patients.

Margaret Thatcher, a former prime minister of the United Kingdom in the 80's, once said, "Disciplining yourself to do what you know is right and important, although difficult, is the highroad to pride, self-esteem and personal satisfaction". As I undertake the CCPP bridging program and other mandatory licensure PEBC exams, it is not lost on me that the real work starts beyond the lecture room. It is about the walk-in patient coming to get their flu vaccination. That loyal patient of ours on chronic medications for hypertension. The 2-year-old with a fever. Not forgetting the long-term care patient we prepare blister packs for.

I can understand that interaction with other pharmacists and pharmacies can be challenging because of perceptions of competition, but at the top of it all, working with the pharmacists in my city, province and country is how best we can create practice change. I therefore plan to attend conferences not only for the content but also to meet other pharmacists and then stay in contact with them. When I read or hear of a pharmacy that is doing a type of clinical service that I am interested in, I will plan to contact them and ask questions. To top this up, I will follow journals, blogs and articles and look for ways to apply what has been successful for other pharmacists to what I would be trying to do as a pharmacist myself. Divided, the profession lacks the harmony and consistency to truly change practice and the way we are seen by our stakeholders. United, the possibilities of where our profession will go are endless.

I recognize that physicians and other healthcare professionals are a crucial group on whom we need to focus our advocacy efforts on. They are key to developing solid interpersonal relationships and can support our profession when advocating both for and to patients. I will therefore utilize phone calls or even visits to the offices of physicians, nurse practitioners and so on in my community, as well as those from whom I receive frequent prescriptions as a way to build these relationships, making sure to inform the practitioners of the services provided by our pharmacy, as well as any special areas of training or interest I may have.

Patients are arguably the most difficult and important group to advocate to about our role in the healthcare team. I plan to do this through verbal interaction tips, as well as non-verbal communication tools, with the ultimate goal being increasing our patient's awareness about our role in their health. Whenever possible, I will take the chance to explain to our patients the steps we go through to complete any service we would've provided. For instance, when counselling patients on a new medication, I would make them aware that I have checked for any drug interactions with their existing medications, that this is not one of the medications they are allergic to or that a dose seemed incorrect so I clarified with their physician. I do acknowledge that every practice is different and unique. With that said, every patient interaction must ultimately be meaningful.

As I conclude, one quote from Julius Caesar resonates well with me: “Experience is the teacher of all things”. I am committed to being a lifelong learner and I look forward to gaining more insight on how to better advocate for the profession through different encounters with patients.