

Reflecting on the Fine Print: The “So What?” Of Rho Chi

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As I was thinking about what to share with you today, I felt drawn to the idea of exploring (in as meaningful a way as one can in 30 minutes) some issues that may lie below the surface of Rho Chi membership.

Being invited to join the Society is a high honor, and most qualified to receive it are understandably excited and proud. There is always much celebration and hoopla surrounding initiation, and rightly so. Friends, family and faculty gather. Meals are enjoyed, and lots of photos are taken. The academic achievements of new members are praised. Parents beam. Perhaps a special lecture is given. But when the roses given out during the ceremony have seen their last days, when the octagonal key has taken its place in a drawer or jewelry box, when the notation of Society membership has been added to the CV, then and only then do the real responsibilities of being a Rho Chi member begin.

“Responsibilities?? Wait....my plate is full! Who said anything about responsibilities?”

Well, if you were listening closely to the initiation ritual, you’ll know that the Society did...three times, no less.

*“Our membership confers distinction, but keep this well in mind, no distinction, no honor, no privilege, comes to anyone without added **responsibilities**.”*

*“We have chosen with care, mindful of the **responsibilities** that will be yours.”*

*“Listen well to our mission and vision statements in order that you may better understand the high honor of membership and what is expected” (i.e., what are the **responsibilities**) “of a Rho Chi member.”*

When informing me of my receipt of the 2012 Lecture Award, the Executive Council suggested that I address the “*Now What?*” question of having been inducted into the Rho Chi Society. But, upon reflection, I decided the question that each and every one of us should be able to answer at this point in our professional lives is “*So What?*” You’ve been inducted into Rho Chi....So what? What makes the Rho Chi Society a different organizational animal than other highly valuable professional societies, and how are you internalizing those differences and allowing them to shape who you are and what you do?

In the time we have together, I’d like to explore some of the responsibilities and professional mandates embedded in the mission and vision of the Society, and reflect on how they might play out in your lives. That’s the ‘fine print’ I’m referring to in the title of this Lecture; the unstated expectations of how what you pledged when you promised to “support the Society and work with the Society to the best of your ability” will guide your professional and personal behaviors.

I will be using some illustrative examples gleaned from experiences with my own students, but I'm sure that any Rho Chi advisor in the audience could come up to the podium right now and deliver a similar lecture using examples from your chapter. It is my hope that our brief collaborative reflection will stimulate additional, more personal, reflection so that each of you, if ever asked... "Rho Chi? So What?"...can respond thoughtfully, clearly, and with conviction.

Intellectual excellence and leadership

Rho Chi expects its members to "pursue intellectual excellence" and be "lifelong intellectual leaders in pharmacy". Every member of the Society has shown themselves to be intellectually gifted, academically tenacious, or both. By applying yourself to your studies and working hard, you rose to the top 20% of your class. But a key word in this Society expectation is 'lifelong'. How does one demonstrate intellectual excellence and leadership once the days of calculating GPAs are over? What's the 'fine print' in this specific Society aim you've pledged to honor?

To exhibit intellectual leadership demands that you always look at every professional problem beyond the superficial and bring in evidence to illuminate which path to take. A lyric from Gilbert & Sullivan's operetta **HMS Pinafore** warns that "things are seldom what they seem" and it takes the deep and critical thinker to work through the "What if" and "Yes, but" elements in any seemingly straightforward issue. Sometimes the time it takes to thoughtfully dissect and research a problem and evaluate potential solutions is significant, and it may irritate those who simply want to act on what they see as the 'obvious' and move on. Sometimes those being irritated are those we report to. But if the stakes are high (and what could be higher than the quality of patient care outcomes?) then it's a mandate we must judiciously honor.

One example of intellectual leadership by a student pharmacist I'd like to share with you came from a recent alumnus named Sara who, when she was a P2 student, phoned me about a problem she was facing at her community pharmacy worksite. A patient on fentanyl patches was routinely asking for his prescription refills before they were due, and the pharmacist in charge assumed he was engaging in the drug seeking behavior that characterizes addiction. However, Sara wondered if something else could be motivating the behavior and she began to dig into the patient's profile. Finding that he had been prescribed butorphanol nasal spray for breakthrough pain, and recognizing from its structure that it would antagonize fentanyl's mu receptor-derived analgesia, she tried to convince her preceptor to initiate a conversation with the prescriber about switching to an oral codeine-based mu-agonist for breakthrough pain control. When the pharmacist dismissed her suggestions out of hand, the student consulted with the pain specialist on our faculty and they gathered literature to support her recommendation. Sara tried for a full week to convince her preceptor that a change in this patient's medication was warranted, but to no avail. This pharmacist consistently refused to consider Sara's evidence and consult with the physician. As a result, the patient was not able to benefit from Sara's intellectual leadership and professional commitment.

As you might imagine, Sara was very disappointed in this outcome, as she felt both a professional and a personal responsibility to this patient. However, recognizing her role in the pharmacy as a student intern, she ultimately had to be satisfied with gaining insight on the level at which she intended to practice her profession, and with knowing she had done all she could

under the circumstances. Now this particular student was not a member of Rho Chi, but I believe her to be a shining example of what intellectual leadership is all about. I urge every current and future practitioner in this room to both follow Sara's example and set stellar examples of your own.

Fortunately, demonstrating intellectual leadership doesn't always have to be a painful or disillusioning process. A quick story on intellectual leadership with a happier ending involves another P2 student, Amber, who worked at an oncology practice and was caring for a colorectal cancer patient on oxaliplatin. This patient was experiencing some significant peripheral sensory neuropathy secondary to this organometallic's ability to chelate intracellular calcium ion. We had recently covered the chemical rationale behind this unwanted action (displacement by cellular water of oxalic acid dianion, which then chelates intracellular divalent cations, including calcium), along with the value of administering a calcium ion replacement to reverse the use-limiting side effect. The student brought this suggestion to the oncologist who, unlike the pharmacist in the previous story, both welcomed and willingly entertained it. After confirming its value in the literature, he added calcium gluconate to the patient's regimen and the peripheral sensory neuropathy was resolved.

Pursue critical inquiry

A Society mandate closely related to intellectual leadership is to pursue critical inquiry to advance the profession. The fine print, or the "So what?", in this requirement is to be unrelentingly proactive in seeking opportunities to put your knowledge to use to educate others and/or optimize patient care outcomes.

I enjoy jazz music and recently heard a song called "Lazy, That's All" performed by Catherine Russell. While the song is clever and catchy, and I thoroughly enjoyed her performance, it struck me that being "Lazy, that's all" is the antithesis of Rho Chi's expectations of its members. Laziness is simply unacceptable in the Society's world. Rather, Rho Chi members are expected to make a conscious commitment to be catalysts for professional advancement, and to take the lead in accomplishing what we at Creighton call the magis (The More), which translates roughly into continuous quality improvement.

Another student-generated example to illustrate this 'fine print principle' comes from another Sarah, who took a casual encounter with a patient at a drive through window of her community pharmacy workplace to make a significant difference to mental health providers working with underserved individuals in the Omaha community. As Sarah was briefly chatting with the patient while her prescription was being checked, the patient, an employee of an organization called Region 6 Behavior Health, asked if Sarah knew anyone who could talk to the pediatric population care staff about the psychotropic medications commonly prescribed for their patients. The encounter lasted only minutes, and Sarah could have easily dismissed it as she returned to other duties and demands in the busy pharmacy, assuming that someone else would do it. But she decided then and there that our Rho Chi chapter not only could, but should fulfill this community need, and her enthusiasm for the project brought everyone immediately on board.

To ensure a successful outcome, Sarah and the team met with the providers at Region 6 to clearly identify their learning needs. She then recruited the involvement of our School's Board certified psychiatric pharmacist and, with her fellow Rho Chi members, researched all anti-anxiety, antidepressant, and antipsychotic drugs commonly prescribed for pediatric patients. They summarized the most pivotal findings into an informative handout to accompany the group presentation they made to the providers and care staff. The presentation initially made to pediatric providers was so well received that the group was invited back to present to those working with adult patients. Sarah willingly brought the chapter members together again to refocus the information originally provided to the new patient population, and had another grand success.

The positive impression of pharmacy (and of pharmacists) that Sarah and her team drove home to those audiences cannot be overstated. These students identified a need, joyfully embraced their professional responsibility to fill it, took the time and energy out of their busy P3 lives to research, evaluate and organize information to deliver on a commitment in the most quality-centered way possible, and went the extra mile to deliver again after one initial success.

While Sarah and her team never encountered any overwhelming brick walls when attempting to live out the Rho Chi mandate to advance the profession through their intellectual efforts, it is certain that we will all face challenges to accomplishing what we know to be noble goals many times in the course of our professional lives. Some of these challenges will seem insurmountable and sometimes not worth the stress, but this is where the fine print of the promises you made as a Rho Chi member to exhibit intellectual leadership, advocate critical inquiry and advance your profession need to kick in. If you encounter unexpected hurdles or barriers to success, that's okay. Take a step back, re-group, strategize, and consider an alternative path to the desired end. There's a fine line between dedication and bullheadedness, and a key element of critical inquiry is to seriously consider the thoughts, ideas, goals and criticisms of others with a stake in the outcome. In other words, it's okay to take a few running starts to a problem before you break through to a viable solution. But it is not acceptable to say "Oh well...I tried...(kind of)" if the need is great and you are capable of being part of that solution. The 'fine print' to this part of my message is that 'Lazy, That's All' is not the Society's theme song.

Creativity

While not specifically in the Rho Chi mission and vision statements, there's no doubt that the Society embraces creativity and values that attribute in its members. The importance that Rho Chi places on creativity is documented by the fact that, each year, the Society awards prestigious prizes to chapters which implement innovative programs that address an identified need on their campus or in their community. Many outstanding chapter initiatives have been recognized in the recent past, and several have served as models for chapter-sponsored programs and activities across the country. I commend all Chapters who have been honored with Chapter Project Proposal and Chapter Achievement awards.

An example of creatively advancing the Rho Chi mission and vision that's close to home for me involves the ongoing collaboration between Creighton's Alpha Alpha chapter and a local health clinic run by the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska. The Fred LeRoy Health and Wellness Center is

named after a formal Ponca Tribal Chairman who was instrumental in regaining federal recognition for the Northern Ponca in 1990 after the tribe was terminated by the federal government in 1966. This Center serves the Omaha urban Indian community and, like essentially every clinic of its type, is seriously underfunded to meet its mission of caring for people with serious chronic health care needs and, very often, few personal resources at hand to maintain good health. Through conversations with Center providers that began in 2000, Alpha Alpha chapter sought to provide the Center's patients with important and culturally focused information on the diseases common to the population, including diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia, obesity, and stress. From that time through present day, the Chapter has researched, produced and revised patient education brochures in partnership with School faculty with needed clinical expertise and the care staff of the Center. These trifold brochures discuss the disease state, and the contemporary approaches to treatment that are either in line with the strategies implemented at the Center, or which can serve as springboards to patient-provider discussion on potential therapies to seek elsewhere. The impact of traditional remedies and self-care practices on the disease, including potential interactions of herbal and/or complementary therapies with prescribed medications, are highlighted. An emphasis on disease prevention and wellness, in addition to pharmacotherapeutic interventions, is evident, and the brochures are written at a level to ensure full understanding by all adult and teenaged patients. The Chapter's commitment to advancing the profession by meeting actual patient care needs is exemplified by the fact that the first brochure, which addressed contraception, was developed at the specific request of the Center's staff.

So the fine print here is the expectation that you'll use your many talents in new and creative ways to accomplish your goals. If it is appropriately thought out, don't be afraid to float out an idea that might seem crazy at first but which, on further reflection, could be refined into the perfect solution. Consider the years of criticism and ridicule that Dr. Daniel Shechtman, who was awarded the 2011 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, endured from the scientific community after he published his theory on the existence of quasicrystals in 1982. The top scientists of his day thought he was nuts, but his discovery was eventually borne out and it has advanced our understanding of matter. Described by his Iowa State colleagues as a "logical thinker, independent-minded, and unafraid to take unpopular positions" he exemplifies the intellectual and integrity-related attributes that Rho Chi expects of its members.

Conduct and character

Speaking of integrity, the Rho Chi mission statement is clear on its expectation that its members will be shining examples of honorable conduct and good character. Obviously it implies truthfulness, dependability, and loyalty to high ideals, so what's the fine print here? To my way of thinking, this Society expectation requires Rho Chi members to be engaged citizens of their many communities; to look around for situations that demand public attention, action or justice, and to be a proactive and vocal advocate for the public health and the public good. You get into Rho Chi through the intellectual gifts housed within your head, but you honor the Society's mission and vision to the greatest extent when you marry those cerebral gifts with a good and giving heart.

Community of scholars

Perhaps the best news embedded within the Society's mission and vision statements is that no Rho Chi member has to save the world on his or her own. We are a community of scholars, and by joining together to advance the Society's aims, we can exponentially expand the good we can do individually. I believe it's clear that, while our community is, by definition, selective, it is not a snootily elitist one. Lots of intellectually talented folks who don't own the Rho Chi keypin, but who do have the determination and the energy to do the right thing, are out there, and they are our colleagues in this profession. (Don't forget the first Sara!). As we advocate for critical inquiry and pursue intellectual excellence in all aspects of pharmacy, so we should embrace everyone who is about that important business. The fine print here is to lead by example, keeping the Society's expectations at the epicenter of your professional self-image, and collaborate willingly and enthusiastically with all who share your passion for its ideals.

In closing, I'll reiterate what I see to be the 'fine print' in the Rho Chi mission and vision, and in the promises you made to our community of scholars when you were initiated. They all require time, effort, and no excuses, but they are what the Society expects of each and every one of you who have accepted membership in this prestigious organization.

- Fight the human tendency to let the other guy do what needs doing. You just do it. Put your gifted brains to work on each and every problem or challenge that comes your way, and then take the lead in finding and implementing viable (and creative) solutions.
- Take the time needed to evaluate issues critically, comprehensively and holistically. Mine the wisdom of others, including your critics (make that especially your critics) when formulating solutions to problems. Remember that anything worth thinking about is worth thinking about in a meaningful way.
- Actively look for opportunities to make a difference in this world. Advocate for the well-being of the patients at your practice site and the people within your community.
- Persist. Do not wimp out if obstacles to achieving your goals materialize. If your ideas are sound, press on with unflagging commitment and determination, even if it seems you are out there all alone. Because, of course, you never are; you're a valued member of a profession-wide community of scholars.
- Be original, innovative and novel in your thinking. Learn from your past experiences, of course, but don't automatically reinvent the wheel or serve up intellectual refried beans when addressing problems. Rather, be an inspiration of creativity for others.
- Advocate for justice and advance the public good. Make sure your head and heart are aligned.
- Build your community of scholars by welcoming all collaborators who hold to the ideals advanced by the Rho Chi Society.

Ultimately, the choice of how you will actualize your responsibilities as a gifted member of the profession is yours. But I hope that, if anyone ever asks you what it really means to be a member of Rho Chi...asks you the "Rho Chi...So What?" question...you'll have reflected seriously on the fine print of our mission and vision, and be ready with your own firm and clear answers.