

Rho Chi Lecture: Writing the Headlines of Tomorrow

March 3, 2013

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Headlines are a reflection of society, what people value or find interesting. They indicate sensational events as well as trends that affect important aspects of peoples' lives. While headlines originated in the print mass media they remain important in our wired and digital world. When headlines are about pharmacy they provide a mirror to how we are perceived by society. Whether headlines are good or bad they influence the course of our profession. Recently the negative headlines about pharmacy unfortunately outnumbered the positive, mostly referring to the New England Compounding Center tragedy, and that is something the profession will need to work through to reestablish credibility and trust that was lost.

We have seen many positive headlines that reflect how pharmacy is changing and moving to a patient-centered rather than product-centered profession. August 14, 2010, a headline on the front page of the New York Times¹ reads "Pharmacists do more than count pills." The story begins:

"Eloise Gelinas depends on a personal health coach. At Barney's Pharmacy, her local drugstore in Augusta, Ga., the pharmacist outlines all her medications,

teaching her what times of day to take the drugs that will help control herd diabetes. ”

This is a lengthy story about Barney's Pharmacy and the pharmacists who work there. They provide a wide range of wellness and clinical services in addition to traditional prescription services. Such a story in a prominent news source is a significant positive impact.

In the December 15, 2012 edition of the New York Times³, on the editorial page the headline read "When the doctor is not needed" and it goes on to describe the potential for pharmacists (and other health professionals) to fill the big gap in primary care. It talks about how pharmacists are underutilized given their education, training and closeness to the community. Last week, on National Public Radio a nationally broadcast story was headlined "Why The Hospital Wants The Pharmacist To Be Your Coach." It talked about how hospitals are partnering with community pharmacies to help keep patients out of the hospital by managing their medications.

What will be the headlines 20 years from now? That will be in an era determined by your generation, not mine. I can imagine the good headlines: "Pharmacists clinical services become a standard in health care" or "Retirees demand medication therapy management by pharmacists" or "Pharmacists play major role in designing drug treatment regimens using genomics." And even the possible negative headlines, such as "Importation and automation lead to demise of the pharmacy profession."

I am and remain very optimistic about our future as pharmacists and the roles that we will play in health care. Medications are much more commonly used, particularly for chronic diseases, and make up a greater portion of the national health care expense

compared with 10 years ago. Medications are increasing as a portion of the national health care budget, the number of prescriptions will significantly increase, as will expenditures on prescription drugs.

When I think about the huge changes that the profession has gone through from the time I graduated in the late 1970's until now I am confident that we will continue to progress as a profession. There is so much that we know now about our profession that was not evident a decade ago. Years ago we talked about how much we needed the evidence for the effectiveness of pharmacists in health care. The evidence is in and has been published in well-respected journals. Studies by Cab Bond showed that clinical pharmacists working in hospitals are associated with lower mortality rates.⁴ Pharmacists effectively manage patients with diabetes, as demonstrated in the Asheville Project,⁵ and manage hypertension⁶ and many other diseases and conditions. Pharmacists activities result in a significant savings in health care costs (approximately \$5 for each dollar spent on clinical pharmacy services).⁷ There are hundreds of other good examples documenting the benefits pharmacists contribute in health care.

So what will prompt the headlines about pharmacy in the future? Certainly we have to hope and also actively work to assure that there are no more drug-related tragedies. The future headlines will result from what the profession does and what we as pharmacists do individually to address societal needs related to medications. I hope that you have seen the vision of pharmacy written a few years ago by the Joint Commission of Pharmacy Practitioners. They describe the role of pharmacists as such:

"Pharmacists will be the health care professionals responsible for providing patient care that ensures optimal medication therapy outcomes" and

“Pharmacists will have the authority to manage medication therapy and will be accountable for patients’ therapeutic outcomes.”

This is a vision well focused on societal needs, and the needs related to medications are obvious. There are many unresolved problems related to medications, including high expense, medication errors, inappropriate drug use, preventable adverse drug effects, poor adherence to therapy, and counterfeit medications. Pharmacists can be assured of an important role in health care as long as we are focused on these needs and unresolved problems. They are not likely to go away any time soon.

Some important points that I would like to talk with you about today is how you as individuals can be a part of writing the headlines of tomorrow. How can you set a foundation for a career of influence on health care. I know that you are going through a rigorous PharmD curriculum but this is not sufficient to assure your success within our profession. As good as your program may be there is a lot that cannot be well taught in the curriculum, such as, how to work in a busy, complex health care environment, how to effectively supervise people, how to make the most effective use of information technology, providing care in rapidly changing health care organizations and understanding rapidly changing areas in biomedical sciences. And there are aspects about pharmacy education that are not the most effective in promoting progressive thinking and acting. We well know that as hard as we try some of what we do in pharmacy colleges is not the best. When we teach factual knowledge it quickly loses its value and can easily be replaced. Pharmacy itself and health care are rapidly changing, requiring new knowledge and skills all the time. And our traditional lecture approach does not instill the desirable attributes needed of pharmacists.

After 35 years as a pharmacist there are some things that have become more clear about what is important in how we act as pharmacists, what we do and how we do it. I am talking about 4 important personal characteristics that lead to the headlines: working hard, capturing ideas, being persistent, and a commitment to quality. The combination of these characteristics is a sure way to a career with significant influence on health care by serving the needs of society. One without the others is not likely to be effective.

Working hard is a necessary foundation for success but not a guarantee. The words can sound trite and many of you may be thinking – “Great, I want a life outside of pharmacy – life is not all about work.” You would be correct and I agree. Hard work has at least two dimensions – quantity and quality. A career objective should not be to work 80 hours per week, and I am not saying that “the more hours you work the higher your chance of success.” Working hard is working smart. Learn how to prioritize, put effort into the important things. Learn what needs to be done now and what should be put off. Remind yourself of your priorities, write them down. I have some key words that I think about from time to time to make sure I am working on top priority areas for my college: usually these are communication, organization structure and people, resources, advocacy for the college, and fund raising. These words help me sort out all that I have to do and keep my work focused. What will be your key words that help you stay on the right path?

Efficiency is an important part of working smart. It is possible and desirable to be more productive and work fewer hours. Identify what distracts you from being productive. It is easier to balance work-home life when you are more efficient. Working

hard, working smart is something you can control early in your career. It sets the foundation for a successful career

So if you work hard where does that get you? Competence - you become reliable and dependable, someone with integrity. These are all good things, but real progress or advancement of the profession takes ideas. Ideas jump start progress. Ideas come from insight and perspective about problems and needs. Develop a mindset to search for ideas about ways to solve problems in health care. Identify the gaps in knowledge and understanding? Any time you hear complaints, problems, or unmet expectations, there are opportunities for new ideas. I believe that ideas come to most people any time of day or night, and most are forgotten. Find ways to capture ideas, write them down, enter them into your iPhone, to save them for later when they can be put into action. A great objective for attending a meeting like this is to come home with one new idea.

I have come to believe that one distinguishing point between an average person and one who has high achievements is not that one does not get the ideas and the other does. It is that the high achiever can carry those ideas forward, can retain them and act on them. Many of us develop a rationale for not moving forward with ideas, a rationale that sounds like common sense but can be code words for inaction and inertia. For example: "it will take too long," "I don't know how," "it is already good enough," or "It would cost too much." When you hear these words a light should go off in your head, to recognize that these can be rationales for discarding good ideas.

Creating headlines and implementing new ideas means being an agent of change. I expect that all of you will at some time want to be agents of change. One of

the most difficult things to manage at any level of professional services is change. People are naturally resistant to it. Change can bring out the negativity in people and you can find yourself fighting an uphill battle. So it is important to have a plan and a method to successfully implement changes. One framework for managing change was written by John Kotter, a Harvard faculty member in his book titles “Leading Change.”⁸ To achieve the kind of change that makes a difference in our profession requires planning and does not happen by chance or waiting for someone else to do it.

When I started as dean at the South Carolina College of Pharmacy, I was faced with a change of major proportions, merging two independent colleges of pharmacy. The newly merged college started out with no focused mission, divergent cultures, minimal trust among faculty, and considerable inertia to resist change. Over the past 8 years we had to work through this to make our college a functioning program of high quality.

I am confident that at some point in your careers, probably sooner than later, you will be faced with implementing an idea that represents a major change. I have found the approach by Kotter extremely helpful and I am sure that you will too when you have the need to implement change. He describes the steps to effectively leading change. It begins by establishing a sense of urgency (communicating why change is needed). Effective change management requires creating a team, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the vision, empowering others, demonstrating “wins, and changing the culture for long-term. With all the changes going on in health care you will have many opportunities to effectively “manage change.”

The third quality for success is persistence. Persistence is patience with effort, focus and commitment to a cause. What do you value highly enough that you would commit to it with years of effort? I don't believe in overnight success in our field, it takes time. For many goals, regularly making incremental advancements over time can bring you a long way. I think that is what persistence is, not being disappointed that you can't change the world over night and having a willingness to hang in there with small changes over time. If there is some achievement or goal that is important to you, be persistent about it. I refer to this as having a "marathon attitude."

The fourth and final characteristic I want to talk about is a commitment to quality. Certainly, everyone can agree with that? But what does it mean? What is quality? You can answer that only by learning about quality. How do you know quality when you see it? This characteristic should really be "A commitment to LEARN about Quality." Think about some of the finer things in life – art, ballet, or very good wine – we don't recognize their qualities until we learn what quality is. To recognize quality we need comparisons, who or what is the best? Whether you admit it or not, not committing to learn about quality is commitment to mediocrity. One of my favorite quotes is from Michelangelo, who said "*The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it.*" With these four characteristics, working hard, capturing ideas, being persistent, and committing to quality, anyone can set the foundation for a career of influence, to write the headlines of tomorrow.

I remain very optimistic for our profession in the years ahead and for your career opportunities. Whether you enter community pharmacy practice, practice in a health system, or in one of the many dozens of other settings, you will find many doors open to

you. Recognize that there are interesting and challenging careers at the interface of other professions and disciplines: for example law, public health, business, computer science and information technology. Being a pharmacist gives you opportunities in these areas that others don't have.

You won't be able to succeed alone. Almost everyone who has been successful can tell you about people who were influential in their careers. Sometimes these are recognized as mentors. I can see clearly in my career how people along the way served as mentors and helped me to get to the next step in my career. I still have mentors who I rely on. Who you associate with is one of the primary determinants of whether or not you will be successful. Successful people create an environment that helps others become successful.

It is important to be observant and identify the successful people around you. The right mentors help you in ways that are difficult to put a price on. They tell you things you didn't know; keep you informed. They are your advocates. They are your best critics who will tell you when you could have done better. They help you solve dilemmas and ethical issues. They keep you anchored to reality.

So, I have talked about the ways that you can put yourselves in a position of influence: working hard (and working smart), cultivating ideas, being persistent, and being committed to learning about quality. Making these characteristics part of you and your career will go a long way to positioning yourself as a person of influence, one who can write the pharmacy headlines of the future. It is entirely appropriate that you would dream about the possible headlines in 10 to 20 years from now as motivation and

inspiration for what you will set out to do in your career. What will the headlines be for your generation of pharmacists?

1. Pharmacists Take Larger Role on Health Team. New York Times. August 10, 2010.
2. When the Doctor Is Not Needed. New York Times. December 15, 2012.
3. Why The Hospital Wants The Pharmacist To Be Your Coach. National Public Radio. February 19, 2013.
4. Bond CA, Raehl CL. Clinical Pharmacy Services, Pharmacy Staffing, and Hospital Mortality Rates. *Pharmacotherapy*. 2007;27:481-93
5. Cranor CW, Bunting BA, Christensen DB. The Asheville Project: long-term clinical and economic outcomes of a community pharmacy diabetes care program. *J Am Pharm Assoc (Wash)*. 2003;43(2):173-84.
6. Carter BL, Ardery G, Dawson JD, et al. Physician and Pharmacist Collaboration to Improve Blood Pressure Control. *Arch Intern Med*. 2009;169(21):1996-2002
7. Perez A, Doloresco F, Hoffman JM, et al. Economic Evaluations of Clinical Pharmacy Services: 2001-2005. *Pharmacotherapy*. 2008;28 (1) :285e-323e
8. Kotter JP. *Leading Change*. Harvard Business Review Press. Boston. 1996.