



Fast food pharmacy: Where speed is more important than substance

THE CONCEPT OF PATIENT-CENTRED CARE HAS BEEN DRILLED INTO OUR heads since the beginning of pharmacy school. The idea of using all of my knowledge and skills to further improve pharmaceutical care for individual patients is a worthwhile thought, but the execution in real-world pharmacy often leaves much to be desired. Time is of the essence in this profession; everybody wants their medications, and they want them now!

Nothing is worse than hearing a patient say “Can you work fast? I have a taxi waiting...” or comments like “All you have to do is label the box — why does it take you so long?” If a patient ordered a Big Mac from McDonalds and was told that it was going to take 10 to 15 minutes for it to be ready, most would have no problem waiting for their greasy reward. However, as soon as a prescription medication is at stake, a short wait to verify the technical and therapeutic aspects of the prescription becomes problematic.

In our education to become pharmacists, we have labs to learn about practical aspects of pharmacy where “real-life” situations are simulated. In patient interview stations, we routinely have around 8 minutes to fully educate a patient about a new prescription or to research and communicate a drug-related issue to a physician. In most community pharmacies, there is very little pharmacist overlap and direct interactions with patients do not get as much time as such interactions merit. With phones ringing, overstuffed baskets of prescriptions to be assembled and labelled, new prescriptions coming into the pharmacy, drug plan adjudication issues and firing the prescriptions out the door as quickly as possible, professional activities sadly often get the short end of time allocation.

As a highly skilled professional, being treated like a fresh-faced worker behind the counter of a fast food joint can be a tough pill to swallow. We are trained health care workers on public display, yet nobody truly knows what we do. Patients see us counting pills, answering the phone, packaging prescriptions,

helping pharmacy staff members and occasionally walking over to the counter to advise patients or to quickly answer health-related questions. The general public doesn’t understand how that time spent waiting for their prescription is used by a pharmacist. We are providing a professional service and are working to improve their health. We look for drug interactions, verify

doses of medications, work to make sure their medication is covered by drug plans and are liaisons between the patient and physician. Pharmacists work in collaboration with the patient’s physician and health care team to provide optimal care — if we need to contact the physician with

an issue or suggestion we will, even if it means the patient has to wait longer. Quality should always be taken over quantity, especially when one’s health is involved.

Pharmacists have to take more ownership of the profession and must work harder at increasing public awareness of what we do. Upon graduation I hope to be able to practise patient-centred care, where I will be less involved in the technical dispensing of medications and will be able to focus on offering professional services. As a new graduate about to enter practice, I will use my knowledge to the best of my ability. While a prescription technical check is essential, my job will not stop there. I promise to spend the time to verify the medication dose and major drug interactions. I will also spend the time to inform patients whether their medication is the same as before, new or if a change has occurred. When patients come in for refills, I will ask them how their therapy is working for them and if they have noticed any side effects. Gone are the days of simply handing a prescription bag to the customer and never hearing from them again. Patient follow-up will become a part of my practice, and I will not be shy about calling a doctor if I have a suggestion or inquiry. This is a promise to myself and my future professional colleagues. Fast food pharmacy has left a bad taste in my mouth, and I will not voluntarily participate in that style of pharmacy. ■

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