

VIEWPOINTS

The Role of Academic Pharmacy to Influence Safety Through Science and Education

William Lang, MPh

Vice President, Policy and Advocacy, *American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy*

The importance of ensuring medication safety, in all its contexts, is a primary reason why pharmacists are licensed healthcare professionals. In turn, the assurance that pharmacists are competent falls at the feet of educators and the public's health is better for it. AACP members take this responsibility to ensure the competence of pharmacists very seriously. Our standing committees and their associated annual reports reflect their commitment to this responsibility.

In this issue of the *Journal*, David Holdford and colleagues, in partnership with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), build upon the recommendations of the annual report from the 2006-2007 Argus Commission: "The Academy's Agenda for Improving the Safety of Medication Use: Report of the 2006-2007 Argus Commission." The Commission, comprised of the 5 immediate past presidents of AACP, was charged by then-AACP President Marilyn Speedie to review the 2006 release of the Institute of Medicine's *Quality Chasm Series: Preventing Medication Errors*, and "analyze the report and discern the implications of the report's recommendations on the Association and its member institutions."

The Commission report states that "a culture of safety should permeate the practice of pharmacy in all settings. The fulfillment of this goal of public protection requires acceptance by the Academy for "engaging partners. . . and assuming leadership in education. . .; research. . .; and practice. . ." The multiple recommendations and suggestions emanating from the report focus on all 3 elements of the mission of higher education. The Commission clearly articulated an interprofessional vision for meeting the public need for improving medication safety. Like the multi-eyed giant of myth, members of the Commission may have recognized that the FDA was about to undergo one of its most extensive transformations through passage of Public Law 110-85, the "Food and Drug Administration Amendment Act of 2007." The development of legislative provisions concerned with improving the science-base of the FDA were strengthened by the input from academic pharmacy. The public's health could be better ensured by expecting a closer working relationship

between the agency and academic institutions through improvements to advisory committee recruitment, restrictive drug decisions, clinical trial registry databases, and other provisions.

Bolstered by legislative authority to reach out to the scientific community to strengthen their public health mission, the FDA held a series of public meetings and at one of these related to risk evaluation and mitigation strategies, the AACP stated its interest in assisting the FDA with its new and expansive legislative mandate. The statement was aimed at creating a real-time, community-based drug safety surveillance program using pharmacy students on advanced pharmacy practice experiences (APPEs). The FDA representatives responded with interest (actually, they were stunned that someone was offering their assistance in regard to postmarket surveillance without first identifying it as a bothersome task) and so began a series of discussions that led to the establishment of a strengthened FDA-AACP relationship. The relationship led to the creation and release of a request for proposals to undertake a "baseline evaluation of the integration of the science of safety into the curriculum of the Doctor of Pharmacy degree in US colleges and schools of pharmacy." The results of that survey are published in this edition of the *Journal*.

Every AACP member, whether a member of the Argus Commission or not, is expected to keep at least one eye on maintaining a contemporary knowledge of how best to educate students to become healthcare practitioners that are responsible for protecting the public's health. As you will read, the survey of the integration of the science of safety reveals some very important opportunities for the academy to fulfill regarding its competence assurance responsibility to the public and students. The fact that the academy, through our committees and commissions, continues to make itself relevant and influential in the public policy arena is one of its key strengths. This strength can assist students, federal agencies, and the citizens for whom they are responsible to work together toward making our lives safer and of higher quality.