

Pharmacists step up to the challenge of COVID-19

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THIS IS AN UNPRECEDENTED TIME FOR CANADIANS. AND FOR pharmacists. To say that pharmacists are stepping up to the challenges raised by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic seems like the understatement of the century. But we want to recognize the efforts everyone has made in this crisis—a time when there has been significant stress and hardship for people all over, but one in which all have worked hard to adapt. In this issue, we report on drug shortages in the wake of COVID-19, as well as the controversy over ACE2 (angiotensin converting enzyme 2), ACE (angiotensin converting enzyme) inhibitors and angiotensin receptor blockers and COVID-19, and feature messages of thanks from CPhA and its past presidents and chairs.

In recognition of the extraordinary efforts of Canadian pharmacists during this crisis, we asked you to share stories of your experiences in caring for your patients. These stories illustrate the breadth of pharmacist roles throughout the health care system and your flexibility and dedicated service to the public. They also show that pharmacists are willing and able to step up to real challenges when needed and that you put the needs of your patients and your communities first and foremost.

As we read through the stories, the word *collaboration* resonated. People write about collaborating with other pharmacists, their staff and other health care providers. They demonstrate approaches to cooperation and communication from the practice level to the organizational level and across communities, provinces and nationally.

The landscape of health care has shifted dramatically in the past few months. Community pharmacists are now often the first (and sometimes only) person a patient is able to connect with to help address a medical question or to provide reassurance and support. Pharmacists have a responsibility to ensure patients receive safe, effective medication therapy. This includes ensuring patients have an adequate supply of medication and are able to take it correctly. The term *accessible* has taken on more meaning as community pharmacists organize

delivery systems, extended hours, curbside pickups, telephone and virtual counselling and consultations with their patients. Pharmacists working in family practice clinics and those working in hospital are sharing and providing much-needed and coordinated guidance for the use of medications during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The challenges have not been small. Community pharmacists and their staff have struggled with the lack of personal protective equipment, speculation (without evidence) on COVID-19 cures and harms and rapidly changing regulations to accommodate needed changes to scopes of practice. People have reorganized their workspaces and workflows to minimize risk to their staff and patients. Many pharmacists have rapidly moved to virtual consultations. The ability to adapt quickly to these changes reflects an inherent flexibility in modifying organizational processes to maximize efficiency and safety.

From these stories and others, we sense the dedication and responsibility that pharmacists feel in service to their communities—to the public, to their staff and to their colleagues. We also appreciate the role our pharmacy organizations are playing at this time—in supporting us, in communicating with us and in working together.

What will be the impact of all of this? As we watch pharmacists and their staff provide care and emotional support to help people bear the burden of the pandemic, as we watch them trying to keep their older and comorbid patients healthy, as we watch them work with each other, we can all be proud of ourselves as health care professionals. We agree with our contributors that you should all feel proud and energized by the good—no, *great*—work you're doing.

In the coming months, we hope to hear more of your stories. We'll continue to publish and share them. Please see www.pharmacists.ca/cpj for information about submitting a story or continue to share photos and short vignettes on Twitter (tag us @CPJ_RPC).

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