First impressions of the world of pharmacy

BY PERRY
EISENSCHMID,
HBA, MBA

IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT I AM ALREADY INTO month 3 as CEO of CPhA. But as they say, “Time flies when you’re having fun!”

I think the main benefit of being brand new to the profession is that I see the world with a fresh set of eyes. My perspective is not filtered by thoughts like “we’ve tried that before” or “they will never agree to that.” Of course, the downside of my early views is that they might be a little naive. Nonetheless, I thought my first column for this publication should offer my preliminary insights on the fascinating and rapidly changing world of pharmacy.

I’ve already met dozens of important people involved in the health care field. I’ve met representatives of the government, various professions, the regulators, manufacturers, payers, retailers, educators and many more. The one goal everyone has in common is the desire to improve patient experiences and patient outcomes. Where opinions start to diverge is where we need to focus our efforts to achieve this end. For example, governments are placing greater emphasis on the cost-effectiveness of solutions as our aging population and strained public finances make our current system unsustainable. Regulators want to ensure that our profession and its systems and processes remain safe as this industry undergoes massive changes in the years ahead. Pharmacists want to make better use of their extensive skills and training to take on more responsibility for patient care. The list goes on and on.

The great news is that many of these differing views are easily reconciled. For example, we know that pharmacists can take on an expanded role in health care delivery *and* lower costs to the health care system. However, progress on this front is not happening fast enough. On that point, once again, almost everyone agrees. And this is the common thread in virtually every conversation

I have had with health care representatives—how do we get pharmacies and pharmacists to fully and successfully implement an expanded scope of practice?

The more I talk to experts in this field, the more I understand and appreciate the obstacles. There are behavioural challenges—how can we help pharmacists to become more comfortable treading into this new territory? There are cultural issues—how do we reconcile the need to provide fast, efficient, high-volume dispensing with the desire to provide more consultation? There are economic issues—do we have the right financial incentives in place and are they aligned with our desired outcomes? There are educational issues—are pharmacists adequately trained and equipped to provide these new services to ensure patient safety? Again, the list goes on.

And that’s where I think I can help to make a difference. CPhA is already well positioned to deliver on this front. But we want to make some important adjustments in the months ahead to have an even greater impact. We will be changing our governance structure to better engage and represent pharmacists, pharmacy associations and stakeholders across this country. We will be expanding our educational services to address some of these new challenges. We will be providing our essential pharmacy-related publications in new, easier-to-use formats. We will be working with all of the key stakeholders to identify and share more broadly what is working well and what needs to be improved. And we will help to identify areas that we need to research more fully and will try to find partners to help fund such research work.

Stay tuned. These are exciting times for pharmacy and for CPhA. I look forward to meeting you and working with and for you in the months and years ahead!