Editorial

Succession Planning: The Right People in the Right Positions at the Right Time

Kate Farthing, PharmD, BCPS, FASHP*

Do you know who will be the next pharmacy director in your department? Who will be the next residency program director? We don't typically place a priority on succession planning in our departments and often are forced to make a quick decision to fill a position when there is a medical leave, an unplanned move to another city, or another unexpected turn of events.

Succession planning is routine in the executive levels of corporations and health systems but is not typical on the department level. White and Enright recently repeated their survey of pharmacists to determine whether the leadership crisis numbers had changed from the 2005 survey results.¹ Given the number of pharmacy directors who plan to retire in the next decade, it is estimated that the profession will need about 4,600 individuals for pharmacy director positions, which represents 77% of the current pharmacy directors. This is slightly lower than the 80% of current directors who were planning to retire in the next decade from the 2005 survey. A positive from the repeat survey is that 45% of present practitioners are currently considering leadership positions, up from 30% of practitioners who were considering leadership positions in 2005. It is good news that more practitioners are considering leadership positions, and we must continue to foster leadership development at all levels (students, new practitioners, clinical staff, and seasoned practitioners) to manage the complexities of today's health system pharmacy.

Start a conversation in your department on the philosophy of succession planning about the reasons for succession planning and how the plan will be used. Planning for coverage during scheduled time off or a planned absence is different than planning for a permanent replacement, and both scenarios require a time investment. You will identify that key positions may be unique to your leadership structure, and the talents of a technician manager, residency program director, and lead workers should be considered part

of the succession plan. You will also identify those who can step into leadership roles immediately and those who can be successful with additional development.

How do we mobilize the 45% of current practitioners who are considering leadership positions? Start by identifying who these individuals are – almost half of your current staff may be interested in a leadership position! Find an opportunity to ask the question either directly (Have you considered a leadership position?) or indirectly (Where do you see your next position taking you?). Think back to those individuals who are always willing to take on a new project, learn a new skill, or pick up the extra student on rotation unexpectedly – they should be targeted for increased responsibility within the department.

Assess the talent of individuals on your team today and use a gap analysis to help determine growth and development opportunities for them. Develop talent through coaching and mentoring, beginning with open and honest dialogue about the organization and the department. Set the next generation up for success by guiding them when possible instead of adopting the “sink or swim” philosophy as they try on leadership roles. Help them understand what to expect in a given situation or how to handle an unfamiliar group or circumstance. Role play or practice a conversation to help work through uncomfortable or new situations. Allow them to fix problems, develop workflow, or propose solutions, but take the time to debrief them after the fact to allow them to grow with each new experience.

You can continue the leadership development of some individuals by, for example, suggesting they join a multidisciplinary committee and represent the department. Set expectations to help the leaders-in-training understand their role on the committee; let them know what resources are available. Have them report back to you or others on the management team about the committee direction or goals.

*Clinical Pharmacy Specialist, Legacy Health System, Portland, Oregon

To help identify the next practitioner to coach or mentor, start a leadership book club or other informal meetings to get to know your team better. Select an easy read for the book club; *Whack a Mole* (David Marx) or *Checklist Manifesto* (Atul Gawande) are easy to pick up and apply to any health care setting. Share stories of how you and the individuals on your leadership team grew into your current roles. Formal education (advanced degree) or organized leadership training (residency, fellowship, or the Pharmacy Leadership Academy) may have been part of your path; support team members who may be interested in similar opportunities. Many organizations have leadership development programs for new managers through the human resource department, which offers another chance for a practitioner to network with others in the organization. Shadowing is another way to give interested leadership candidates insight into this new role.

An estimated 45% of current practitioners are considering leadership positions, and we will have at least 4,600 formal leader positions to fill in the next 10 years. Identify the needs of your department and begin

your succession plan. There are current practitioners interested in leadership who are waiting for the conversation.

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REFERENCES

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