Canadian Pharmacist of the Year: John Papastergiou

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THE CANADIAN PHARMACIST OF THE YEAR award recognizes a pharmacist who demonstrates leadership and exemplifies the evolution of the pharmacy profession toward an expanded role in health care.

This year's Canadian Pharmacist of the Year has used his unique background in clinical research to develop revolutionary screening clinics for his patients. John Papastergiou applies a distinctive brand of quantitative research methodology to test initiatives in the community pharmacy setting, successfully integrating meaningful pharmacy practice research into his daily practice.

As both an active researcher and a compassionate practitioner, John believes that pharmacy practice research in the community is fundamentally important if the profession is going to move forward. "I employ research strategies to validate the effectiveness of innovative clinical programs and to explore an expanded role for community pharmacists," he says. Recognizing that the easy accessibility of community pharmacists placed them in a unique position to actively

screen and monitor patients for various chronic diseases, John and his team initiated a number of practice-based research projects to evaluate his hypothesis, including programs for A1C screening, home medication review outreach and cardiovascular risk assessment and lipid screening. These 3 programs have resulted in numerous publications (several in *CPJ*) and presentations and have unquestionably led better patient care. For example, the A1C screening program was developed to assess how patients with diabetes were managing their disease state and to make appropriate clinical interventions if required. The initial pilot project involved 39 patients; however, the program has since been expanded nationally and has reached over 13,000 patients.

These programs not only provide pharmacists with the opportunity to play a prominent role in the screening and monitoring of patients with chronic diseases but also provide an effective mechanism for improving patient education, enhancing management of chronic disease states and increasing pharmacist-physician communication. John's practice-based research initiatives include strategies to alleviate the financial pressure placed on pharmacies that attempt to implement innovative clinical interventions. Each program he develops requires a workflow to monitor the pharmacist's time, and the screenings are conducted in conjunction with other professional services that currently provide reimbursement. This method has proven to be financially feasible and has allowed the clinics to be offered to large numbers of patients.

John sees the pharmacy as a natural health care hub for the community. "The pharmacy has gone beyond being simply the location to pick up dispensed medication," he explains. "It is the place where patients go to seek drug information, receive drug therapy recommendations, have access to screening for chronic diseases and even receive vaccinations. It is the place parents call at midnight when their child has a fever or where they bring a confused elderly relative to sort out their medication."

John is a graduate of the Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Toronto. He owns and operates 2 Shoppers Drug Mart stores in downtown Toronto. He is actively engaged in his community and has helped raise over \$100,000 as the associate lead for the Shoppers Drug Mart Tree of Life Campaign for the Toronto East General Hospital. John was the 2012 recipient of the national Shoppers Drug Mart Associate of the Year award. His current research initiative focuses on the impact of pharmacist-directed influenza vaccination.

John explained how he sees his role evolving as the health care system changes:

This is the single most exciting time in the history of the profession. Financial

sustainability, timely access to care and patient safety are the most pressing issues facing the Canadian health care system. It seems like the scope of practice is changing almost daily in order to address these challenges. Pharmacists will be required to be leaders in the change management process to alleviate these pressures. They will be required to reexamine their functions in the existing environment and must evolve their practice in order to meet the increasing demands for improved access to care. Pharmacies will need to expand their offering of professional services as they shift the focus of their sites from primarily dispensing to patient-centred practice models.