Director's Forum

Assuming a Pharmacy Organization Leadership Position: A Guide for Pharmacy Leaders

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Important and influential pharmacy organization leadership positions, such as president, board member, or committee chair, are volunteer positions and require a commitment of personal and professional time. These positions provide excellent opportunities for leadership development, personal promotion, and advancement of the profession. In deciding to assume a leadership position, interested individuals must consider the impact on their personal and professional commitments and relationships, career planning, employer support, current and future department projects, employee support, and personal readiness. This article reviews these factors and also provides an assessment tool that leaders can use to determine their readiness to assume leadership positions. By using an assessment tool, pharmacy leaders can better understand their ability to assume an important and influential leadership position while achieving job and personal goals.

*It is not hard to be successful by working hard; there is very little competition!*¹

—Clifton J. Latiolais, MS, ScD

Pharmacy directors work diligently to ensure that their departments have the resources needed to meet patients' needs. In addition to their job commitments, many health-system pharmacy leaders externally advocate for the profession through membership in professional organizations. A small number of those leaders who participate in professional organizations aspire to assume important and influential leadership positions in those organizations, such as president, board member, or committee chair. These positions require a time commitment that often conflicts with personal commitments such as family duties/priorities, friends and community activities, and work. The following case illustrates how assuming a high-profile leadership role in a professional organization impacts a pharmacy director.

A pharmacy leader has been a director for over 10 years in a 450-bed acute care community hospital. They have 10 direct report employees and nearly 100 other staff members. The director has always been involved with local and national pharmacy organizations and has the opportunity to run for president of a national organization. The director decides to place their name on the ballot and discusses the time commitment with

their executive administrator and staff; they are given approval to dedicate up to 20% of the workweek to the position. The director is also given approval for a 10% to 15% time commitment during the following year as the former president. As the director's presidential year begins, it is evident that the actual time commitment for the position greatly exceeds 20%. The management team and employees within the pharmacy department begin to feel abandoned and unsupported in making decisions and running their departmental areas. Major projects within the department are delayed or must be completed with minimal oversight, resulting in poor quality. The executive administrator also recognizes the director's absence and realizes the commitment as president is larger than originally approved. Upon completion of 2 years as president and past president, the director returns to a pharmacy department where many decisions have been made without seeking their input. However, the value of the director having assumed this high-profile position results in their increased ability to recruit the best pharmacists; the department is also recognized by the hospital's administration as a leader across the country. This recognition affects the medical staff as well – who lobby for and secure additional

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resources for the pharmacy. The director is asked to sit on various national committees and is nominated for several awards as a result of their work as the president of the professional organization. Despite these advantages, the director recognizes how their relationships with employees, management team, and the executive administrator have been negatively impacted by assuming the leadership position. The director implements a focused effort to correct some departmental deficiencies as a result of their absence and to regain the confidence of those who previously supported them.

Holding important and influential leadership positions in pharmacy organizations has many advantages and provides excellent opportunities for personal leadership growth and advancing the department and the profession. Understanding the personal and professional considerations in assuming a high-profile leadership position is critical in preventing the scenario described above.

This article describes the factors necessary to consider when making the decision to assume a high-profile pharmacy organization leadership position. It also presents an algorithm to be used as a tool in making the decision to assume such a leadership position. Specifically the aims of this article are to (1) define what is meant by a high-profile pharmacy leadership position, (2) list the commitments necessary to assume such a position, (3) list the personal and professional impacts of assuming high-profile leadership positions, and (4) describe a tool that can be used as part of the decision-making process in considering a high-profile leadership position. We hope that readers will use this article as a tool to aid them in making a decision to run for a leadership office in a professional organization. Assuming and completing a high-profile position in a pharmacy organization can have lasting positive benefits on a department's patient-centered pharmacy services, but the new commitment must be made with thought and transparency about its impact on various parts of the pharmacy director's life and career.

EXAMPLES OF HIGH-PROFILE PHARMACY LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

The American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) statement on leadership as a professional obligation notes that all pharmacists should take personal responsibility for leadership of the medication use process and the mentorship of students, residents, and colleagues.² Although this defines pharmacy leadership obligations from a local hospital or health-system perspective, many pharmacy leaders

assume high-profile leadership positions in professional organizations. High-profile leadership positions are voluntary positions that may or may not be paid, that bring local or national recognition to the participant and their organization, and that require a large time commitment, usually greater than 20% of the total workweek, for several years prior to and following the initial term of service. High-profile leadership may include but is not limited to state, regional, or national association presidents, board of directors, officers, or committee chairs. Leadership positions are not just limited to pharmacy organizations; recently pharmacists served as presidents of the Society for Critical Care Medicine (SCCM) and the American Society for Enteral and Parenteral Nutrition (ASPEN).

TIME COMMITMENT

The pharmacy leader who qualifies for an important and influential position commits to years of service at the local, state, regional and national levels prior to assuming such a position. Commitments to high-profile leadership positions often last for years and require candidates to participate in national positions before and after their initial term of service. Candidates who want to be elected for a high-profile leadership position should expect to dedicate 10% to 40% of their workweek to the leadership position. This time commitment may include as many as 35 to 50 days of national and international travel.

In addition to the time commitments, leadership positions also require a significant emotional commitment to the position that is not reflected in a percentage of effort. This can be time and effort spent dealing with conflict as a result of significant change in the organization. A president of a national pharmacy organization may have meetings in the same week that require travel, hundreds of pages of documents to read in preparation for those meetings, and dozens of communications related to those meetings and ongoing organizational efforts. These additional obligations may not be factored into the original time commitment and can further strain a leader's personal and professional life. **Table 1** shows a typical schedule for an organization president; there is not much room for "down time" or other personal activities.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL FACTORS

Assuming a high-profile position in a professional organization is an important role for health-system pharmacists; the following factors should be considered when deciding to assume a position: personal and

Table 1. Example of the meeting schedule of a national organization president

Meeting	Date
National Conference of Pharmaceutical Organizations meeting	January 7-9, 2016
Committee on Finance and Audit/Executive Committee	January 21, 2016
Board of directors meeting	January 21-22, 2016
Council on Credentialing in Pharmacy meeting	TBD
Joint Commission of Pharmacy Practitioners	TBD
Appointments and conference call with presidential officers	February 9, 2016
Affiliated state society executives meeting	February 28-29, 2016
American Pharmacists Association annual meeting, by invitation	March 4-7, 2016
Commission on Goals	March 8, 2016
Committee on Finance and Audit/Executive Committee	March 8, 2016
Research and Education Foundation Board	March 9, 2016
Commission on Credentialing	March 11-13, 2016
Dubai International Pharmaceuticals and Technologies Conference, by invitation	March 15-17, 2016
European Association of Hospital Pharmacists Congress, by invitation	March 16-18, 2016

Note: TDB = to be determined.

professional relationships, career planning, employer and employee support, current and future department projects, and personal readiness.

Personal and Professional Relationships

Healthy relationships with family, friends, and coworkers are essential in maintaining a positive work-life balance. In fact, understanding family dynamics and their plans for the future is important for professionals in order for them to make the best possible life decision.³ They must discuss the opportunity with family and close friends to obtain their buy-in and support. For example, a new manager who is married with young children may want to wait before assuming additional responsibilities and commitments. However, a senior director of pharmacy with adult children may be able to make a greater commitment to a leadership position. Professionals should determine their goals and a plan for specific relationships in their life to provide clarity and allow for better planning of career leadership.⁴ For example, your goal and plan for a new supervisor in the department may involve working together on a major project and mentoring them as a young leader in the profession.

Career Planning

All leaders must assess their career plan before considering a new position; the same thought process should

be in place when they consider a high-profile leadership position. Professionals should evaluate the longevity of their current leadership position and assess the progress they have made during their time of employment; they should then determine the impact of their being away from their job nearly 40% of the time. The leader's influence may be diluted if they are out of the office for 40% of the time. However, the use of technology to keep in touch with the department (Skype, Go To Meeting) may mitigate this issue. Pharmacy leaders should evaluate whether they have met their 5-year or 10-year goals and how their success or failures in meeting these goals will be perceived when they request permission from executive leadership to accept a position.

Employer Support

Having employer support when assuming an important and influential leadership position cannot be overstated. Strong employer support will allow leaders to participate in high-profile positions without reservation or hesitation and will provide the resources for the leader to be successful when away from work. When having discussions with executive leaders, it is imperative that pharmacy leaders provide explicit, accurate, and transparent expectations for the high-profile leadership position. Effective communication about the leadership commitment will prevent any misunderstandings from occurring after the position has been accepted.

Current and Future Department Projects

To ensure continued departmental success while participating in a high-profile leadership position, the leader should consider the timing of key projects. For example, if the organization plans an overhaul of its electronic record over the next 2 to 3 years, it may not be appropriate for the leader to take a professional organization leadership position in the next 1 to 2 years. Understanding current and future departmental initiatives is critical; if large initiatives are being planned or implemented, it would be in the best interest of the pharmacy leader to defer their involvement in a high-profile leadership position. Also if leaders in other departments are assuming leadership positions, this will further impact the ability of an organization to achieve long-term goals. For example, if a nurse administrator colleague, who is an active participant in implementing bar code-assisted medication administration, accepts a position as a surveyor for The Joint Commission, the pharmacy director should postpone their pursuit of a high-profile leadership position.

Employee Support

A pharmacy leader must understand how their management team and staff perceive them and how their participation in a high-profile leadership position will affect those relationships. In addition to staff perception, leaders should consider how much guidance staff need to complete daily tasks and troubleshoot department issues. If a more hands-on approach is needed, it may be an indicator that the pharmacy leader should not take on additional commitments and will not be able to take time away from the health system. Additionally, pharmacy leaders should consider how many direct reports they currently manage and the implications of additional leadership involvement on these staff members. For example, a pharmacy leader who has 6 direct reports will likely be able to thrive in a high-profile leadership position due to ease of access and communication across the direct reporting staff. Conversely, an administrator with 30 direct reports may be challenged to maintain relationships and open communication.

Personal Readiness

This factor may be the most important. Leaders who are considering high-profile positions must be honest with themselves about their

personal readiness to accept these positions. Pharmacy leaders must examine whether they are comfortable in their current health-system role and whether they are prepared for a significant amount of additional responsibility and time away from the office. At the same time, leaders must identify the true purpose behind their drive and passion for pursuing a high-profile position. Pharmacy leaders must evaluate whether their interest is based on their desire to achieve personal notoriety, career validation, and prestige or whether it is a true call to leadership.

ASSESSING THE FEASIBILITY OF ASSUMING A PHARMACY LEADERSHIP POSITION

The previous sections of this article have reviewed the factors that leaders should consider when assuming a high-profile position in a professional organization. **Table 2** provides a list of exploratory questions to be asked when considering a professional organization leadership position. These questions are meant to be self-reflective. **Figure 1** lists the personal and professional considerations for assuming a leadership position and provides “yes” and “no” columns for responses. We suggest that the pharmacy leader review the questions in **Table 2**, and then use **Figure 1** to chart their answers. The factors in **Figure 1** are not weighted; they will have different weights based on the leader’s life situation. Again although there is no scoring system or number of yes responses that constitute a decision, the tool visually depicts the readiness of the pharmacy leader and provokes thought during the decision-making process.

The opportunity to participate in a high-profile position can be tempting to many leaders within pharmacy departments. In all cases, these high-profile leadership positions have a prerequisite of years of local and regional involvement and may require 10% to 40% of time away from work. Leaders who pursue these positions often do not consider all of the potential benefits and risks of their decision prior to participation. Those who allow emotions and peer pressure to affect their decision rather than their life plan and the big picture of the situation may gain less benefit and more harm from participation.⁴ Pharmacy leaders who pursue high-profile positions can limit or avoid personal and professional regrets or hardships with thoughtful planning and careful consideration.

Table 2. Self-reflection questions when considering a high-profile leadership position

Personal and professional considerations	Self-reflection questions
Relationships	1. What are the plans for my family in the next 5 years? 2. How have I managed relationships in my life to this point? 3. Would family and friends support the additional commitments and responsibility?
Career planning	4. How long have I been in my current role? 5. Have I accomplished my 5-year or 10-year plan for job success? 6. What benefit/risk could this leadership role have on my career?
Employer support	7. Do I have a good relationship with my executive health system leadership? 8. Am I prepared to be transparent about the commitments required for the proposed leadership position? 9. How will I be perceived by executive health system leadership if I pursue this position?
Current and future department projects	10. What major department projects or initiatives will I be involved with in the next year? 11. What is the current perception of the pharmacy department by other departments? 12. As a leader, how has my performance been for managing current projects in the department?
Employee support	13. How will my management team and other staff perceive me if I pursue this position? 14. How many direct reports do I have? 15. Is my department fairly autonomous or does staff require daily oversight?
Personal readiness	16. Have I found comfort in my current position? 17. Am I pursuing this leadership role for the right reasons? 18. If selected for this high-profile leadership position, will I be able to succeed based on my other commitments?

No	Personal and professional considerations	Yes
✓	Relationships	
	Career planning	✓
	Employer support	✓
✓	Current and future department projects	
	Employee support	✓
	Personal readiness	✓

Figure 1. Example of answers to the assessment tool for considering high-profile leadership positions

CONCLUSION

High-profile leadership positions often require large time commitments and hard work, compounded with the demands of competing obligations and the difficulty of maintaining work-life balance. When considering involvement in a high-profile position, pharmacy leaders should ensure that (1) they feel a true call to leadership, (2) this is the appropriate time for the commitment, (3) they have fully disclosed the extent of the expected commitment to executive leadership, (4) they have obtained staff buy-in, and (5) they have spent sufficient time in planning and thoughtful consideration. Pharmacy leaders should use the self-reflection questions and the assessment tool from this article to help guide their decision-making process when considering running for or accepting a high-profile leadership position.

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