Assessments: Great hockey players and great pharmacists share skill sets

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IN 2015, *CPJ* PUBLISHED AN ARTICLE TITLED “INTERPROFESSIONAL Collaboration in Health Care: Lessons to Be Learned from Competitive Sports,” in which the authors, Brennan Bosch and Holly Mansell, drew analogies between the importance of teamwork in health care and elite-level hockey.¹ This got me thinking along similar lines, and I realized that as pharmacists, we have more in common with top-level hockey players than we might think.

Strength in teamwork is undeniably one of the most important skills we share with hockey players, but drilling down

further to the level of one-on-one performance, more similarities can be found. Participating in the challenging world of professional hockey may appear to be out of the reach of most of us; however, you might just be using the same sort of skills that great NHLers depend on—in the new world of pharmacy, we are being challenged to raise our game on a daily basis, and I believe we function at an elite level comparable to pro athletes.

One of the key abilities required of both professions is the assessment. I learned as a young hockey player to make sure that when I first come out on the ice, I check out the other team to see whether anyone is performing the same action over and over or favouring an arm or leg, perhaps because of an injury.

The pharmacy assessment is best summarized by Cipolle et al.: “The purpose of the assessment is to determine if the patient’s drug-related needs are being met and if any drug therapy problems are present.”² A good assessment depends on the quality and thoroughness of the information gathering and allows us to get to know the patient. We can start to understand their medication experience, health goals, and abilities to adhere to the care plan, and this will aid in the decision-making process when making the drug therapy plan.

This is an essential part of any care plan a pharmacist undertakes and has been discussed in great detail elsewhere.² The basic premise is that the better the information the team receives, the better the plan or output.

Bosch and Mansell’s article was a catalyst that inspired me to review my skills. They broke down the components of what makes a great team and took it out of the context of health and into sports—hockey, of course, this being Canada. Changing the context from one profession to another really has helped me to see what makes things work and what does not. This was a great example. And I like hockey.

Let us look at some of the great hockey personalities and compare what they did on a daily basis to what pharmacists do every day (Table 1).

John Shaske played centre with the Sunshine Coast RCMP team in 1982. This photo was taken in Sechelt, BC.

TABLE 1 Characteristics of successful hockey players and successful pharmacists

Skill/trait	Hockey	Pharmacy practice
1. Gathering information	• The skills and condition of other players • The abilities of yourself and your teammates • Assessment of the entire situation	• The demographics of the patient • The evidence base for drug therapies • The head-to-toe assessment of the patient
2. Evaluating and applying information	• Taking the information and creating a game plan • Creating objective measurable goals for the game • Creating timelines for each goal	• Taking the information and creating a care plan for the patient • Creating objective measurable health goals • Creating timelines for each health goal
3. Communication the information	• Writing a playbook • Talking and explaining to the team • Reinforcing the messages during the game	• Writing a care plan • Talking to the patient and the entire health care team • Following up with the patient
4. Improving performance by reflection	• Getting feedback from the coaches • Getting feedback from other sources • Reflecting on how you can play better next time	• Getting feedback from the patients • Getting feedback from other health care professionals • Reflect on how you can improve your services next time
5. Becoming a leader	• Inspiring other to play better • Doing what is best for the team • Having the courage to do all the above	• Inspiring others to assess patients and resolve drug therapy problems • Doing what is best for the patient • Having the courage to do all the above

Gathering information

Roger Neilson. This NHL coach was an innovator in the use of videotapes to analyze the plays of his and other's teams. His nickname was Captain Video. He checked out what the skills and tendencies of all the players were and assessed the entire situation, just as pharmacists must do today. Pharmacists observe the demographics of the patient, review the evidence-based (or not) therapies and do a physical and emotional assessment of the patient. Better information leads to better performance.

Evaluating and applying information

Wayne Gretzky comes to mind. Gretzky has been praised for highly developed hockey instincts, but he related to reporters that what appeared to be "instinct" was his relentless study and practice of the game, guided by his coaches. This resulted in a deep understanding of the game's changing patterns and dynamics. In an interview, in response to broadcaster Peter Gzowski's theory that what the sports fan takes as creative genius is in fact the reaction to a situation that is stored deeply in the person's brain,³ Gretzky said,

That's 100% right. It's all practice. I got it from my Dad. Nine out of ten people think it's instinct, and it isn't. Nobody would ever say a doctor had learned

his profession by instinct; yet in my own way I've put in almost as much time studying hockey as a medical student puts in studying medicine.⁴

And what do pharmacists do? Like medical students, they study for many years. They apply their skills in learning the demographics of the patients, linking the medications to the diagnosis, assessing their medications (and their evidence base) and talking to the patients and the health care team and developing a plan to follow, making adjustments as they go.

Communicating the information

Ken Dryden comes to mind. During his relatively brief hockey career, Dryden won 6 Stanley Cups in 9 years. One of the jobs of a goalie is to communicate to the players in front of him. It is very difficult to do this, but the results of Dryden's successful career say it all. As examples of his ability to communicate, he wrote many books, including *Face-Off at the Summit* (Canada vs Soviet Union series of 1972); *The Game* (1983), nominated for a Governor General's Award; and *Home Game: Hockey and Life in Canada* (1990), written with Roy MacGregor, which was developed into an award-winning Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 6-part documentary series for television.

Perhaps you have not written books. However, like Dryden when he was on the ice formulating plans, resolving problems and communicating with his teammates, you have to communicate care plans, drug therapy problems and solutions to the patient and the health care team.

Improving performance by reflection

Sidney Crosby. Probably one of the most important goals in Canadian hockey history was scored by Crosby in the 2010 Winter Olympics. In the game in which he eventually scored what is called the “golden goal,” Crosby and all his teammates were being blocked by the US goalie Ryan Miller. Crosby, by taking in information, reviewing how he was playing and reflecting on what was going on, came up with a plan—to go down the wing and shoot the puck but to not look at what was shot at. And the plan worked. The goal was scored. Pharmacists do this all the time as well. We plan and set measurable goals for patients. We get feedback. We adjust and we score amazing victories when helping patients achieve their health care goals.

Becoming a leader

Phil Esposito was an effective leader of his teammates in Boston and then in New York, inspiring them to compete.

But some of his best-remembered leadership occurred during the 1972 Summit Series against the USSR. Team Canada was down 2 games to 1 with a tie and had just lost the fourth game of the 8-game series before going to the USSR in 1972. The Vancouver/Canadian fans booed Team Canada as they skated off the ice. Esposito could have refused interviews and gone to the dressing room, but he gave a very passionate speech from the heart. This speech⁴ is credited with firing up his teammates in their next games in the USSR, and they went on to win the series with 35 seconds left in the final game. Like Team Canada, pharmacists give their best every day for their patients and inspire everyone on their health care team to get the best possible health care outcomes for them. No matter what the obstacles, leaders are out there inspiring others to resolve those drug therapy problems and get results.

Conclusion

A full assessment is required to make a plan. As in the game of hockey, the better we are at putting all the available objective and subjective data together, interpreting the data and then communicating the plan to all stakeholders, the greater the odds are that the plan will succeed. Do you have the courage to improve your patients' outcomes and win for them? ■

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