Telling our story with one united voice

THIS PAST JUNE, I WAS HONOURED AND HUMBLLED to be elected Chair of the Canadian Pharmacists Association. It is a privilege that I do not take lightly and I'm excited to continue our collective work to move our profession forward.

There is no shortage of issues that we face as a profession, from downward pressures on our current reimbursement model, to the restrictions that are placed on pharmacists to practise to their full scope, to the introduction of new and disruptive technologies in our sector.

Layered onto these challenges are the very real and pressing health issues that our patients face, including the epidemic of opioid overdoses, gaps in drug access, doctor shortages and long wait times to access basic health care. This is where pharmacists must seize the opportunities to demonstrate our value to the health care system and our continuous ability to innovate to respond to the needs of our patients.

That is why now, more than ever, it is critical that we come together as a united, strong community, to tell our story to our patients, to governments and to private payers—pharmacists are integral and essential to health care in Canada, and our expertise as drug experts must be recognized and fully integrated into our health care system. It stands to reason that decisions affecting us should and *must* include us.

Although we all see the full gamut of health issues at our pharmacy counters, there is no denying that we are at a critical juncture as we try to stem the tide of opioid misuse and the dramatic increase in opioid deaths across the country.

As drug experts and the most trusted health care professionals, we must be at the forefront of solutions for our patients to help prevent the initial misuse of prescription opioids, support addiction management therapies and promote harm reduction strategies for those who are living with addiction. We must do so with compassion, with empathy and without stigma.

Equally important to the success of our profession is the role of women in pharmacy leadership. Given that women make up the majority of our profession, more than 60%, one of my priorities over the coming year will be to foster increased dialogue and action within our sector to ensure that women are well represented as the next CEOs, entrepreneurs, deans and board members at pharmacy organizations across the country. As a pharmacist and pharmacy owner, I understand some of the barriers that can prevent women from taking on such roles. But I am confident that as we undertake this important conversation, we will make tremendous progress through engagement and discussion and by increasing mentorship opportunities for young women.

One of my favourite quotes is from Coco Chanel: "The most courageous act is still to think for yourself. Aloud." CPhA, together with its members, is dedicated to advocating on behalf of *all* pharmacists who practise in *all* settings. We must leverage our common experiences, learn from each other and harness our powerful stories of patient care. We must never lose sight of our profession's unwavering commitment to the health and well-being of our patients.

Christine Hrudka
CPhA Chair
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