B.C. pharmacist helping student docs to understand pharmacy

Allan Wong teaches family practice residents about the pharmacy side of patient care.

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Family practice residents at the University of British Columbia (UBC) now have a unique opportunity to spend time one-on-one with a pharmacist to see what happens when a prescription arrives at the pharmacy.

The new elective program at UBC’s Faculty of Medicine was initiated by Allan Wong, a pharmacist and associate owner at Shoppers Drug Mart at the Jimmy Pattison Outpatient Centre in Surrey, B.C.

“I just saw a want and a need for this program based on my experience running a pharmacy located in a busy teaching hospital,” he said, adding he spends a lot of time working closely with other healthcare practitioners and answering questions about PharmaCare, certain medications, drug interactions and options available.

When the head resident physician suggested to Wong that it would be a good idea to partner and teach family practice residents how to collaborate better with pharmacists, Wong readily agreed. “So we piloted a program that showed value and is now an elective for family practice residents at UBC.”
Residents who choose the elective spend a week at the pharmacy one-on-one with Wong who asks the students what they’d like to learn. His goal is to help foster better communication and teach the residents how to eliminate confusion when writing prescriptions.

“Anything ambiguous causes a delay for patients,” he says. “I walk them through the pharmacy to show them how their prescription goes through the system and the potential issues that can arise. Is the prescription legible? Does it make sense in relation to the patient’s PharmaNet history? A lot of questions arise when a prescription is ambiguous. For example, when a physician hits ‘renew all’ what does that mean? What if the patient has been to see another doctor? It can create a lot of confusion.”

Wong also goes through the PharmaCare formulary with the students and discusses issues such as the importance of understanding the cost of drugs since some patients are cost-sensitive. Topics discussed include PharmaCare’s Low Cost Alternative (LCA) and Reference Drug Program (RDP), as well as how to fill out Special Authority Request forms.

“This program is for the betterment of patient care and patients are the ultimate winners when there is collaboration between physicians and pharmacists,” says Wong. “Often pharmacists don’t understand what goes on in the doctor’s office and doctors don’t understand what goes on in the pharmacy. We tend not to communicate enough but this program can change the mindset of physicians once they go into community practice.”

While Wong insists he didn’t set out to be a pioneer when he started this program, he is very pleased with how it has evolved over the past year. So far it’s only running in the South Fraser location but Wong said he believes it could be expanded to other regions with other pharmacies involved.

“There is so much potential to improve collaboration between pharmacists and family physicians,” he said. “We need to do more to minimize mistakes and avoid missed communications.”