Stories from the Trenches: Experiences of Alberta Pharmacists Obtaining Additional Prescribing Authority

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Issue:

• Pharmacists in Alberta can apply to the Alberta College of Pharmacists in order to obtain the designation of additional prescriber.
• This designation uniquely allows them to initiate therapy, in addition to other medication-related activities.
• The College does have a system in place to gather feedback from applicants; however, the focus is related to the application form itself, rather than the overall application process.

Solution:

• Our objective was to ascertain specific experiences of pharmacists regarding the decision to apply for additional prescribing authority (APA) and the application process.
• These experiences can inform other pharmacists who are considering obtaining their APA.

How it works:

• All pharmacists involved in a randomized, controlled trial (Rural RxACTION) and who had received their APA were invited to participate in a brief survey.
• Pharmacists were contacted via email and asked to respond to questions regarding their experiences in applying for APA.
• All questions were open-ended and intended to prompt the pharmacist to relate their story regarding the application process.
• No length restriction was applied.
• Responses were analyzed by two independent reviewers using content analysis. Respondents were kept anonymous.

Respondents and questions:

• Fourteen pharmacists participating in the Rural RxACTION study who have APA were invited to participate. All provided responses.
• Pharmacists were asked to respond to the following questions:
  - What prompted you to apply for your APA?
  - What were some of the hurdles you faced in applying? (ex. Obtaining references, changing your practice to adhere to key indicators, convincing yourself of your abilities...)
  - What about this process has surprised you most?
  - How has obtaining this ability impacted your practice? (In general terms and/or illustrated by a specific example)
  - What do you like best about having this new ability?
  - Now given what you know of the process is there anything you would change?

Themes:

- 2 parts
  - Examination of the responses of pharmacists revealed three themes: motivation, hurdles and outcomes.

Motivation

• Pharmacists identified several reasons for applying to obtain their APA including:
  - a desire to improve overall patient well-being and health
  - being at the leading edge of pharmacy practice and change
  - improving collaborative relationships with other health care professionals
  - increase continuity of care
  - validate some of the duties and responsibilities pharmacists were already undertaking.
  - "I am passionate about providing direct patient care (pharmaceutical care), helping patients achieve their health goals and being able to work collaboratively and efficiently with physicians/nurses and other health care providers as part of the interprofessional team. Often we (pharmacists) are making recommendations and suggestions which are accepted but due to process and time – do not get followed through in a timely fashion. This allows for continuity and timely addressing of patients health needs in collaboration with their practitioner."

Hurdles

• Personal – The pharmacists identified a number of personal hurdles, which included being confident in their current level of knowledge and skills, having to self-reflect on their current practice environment, and finding the time to dedicate to the application writing process.
  - "...my greatest challenge was having the confidence to start the application."
• Application – With respect to the application and adjudication process pharmacists discussed uncertainty with respect to expectations of the contents of care plans. Furthermore many pharmacists noted contrary comments from adjudicators regarding their patient cases.
  - "I have noticed resistance and suspicion from other community pharmacists who have received my prescriptions..."

Outcomes

• Patient specific – Now that the pharmacists have their prescribing authority they feel they have the ability to help their patients and to provide care to them more efficiently.
  - "We test patient’s blood INR, check labs, monitor anticoagulation, provide diabetes services, do blood pressures, heights, weights, consult for lifestyle changes, help quit smoking, provide home parental therapy for palliative care, anti-infectives, provide injections, give travel advice, recommend and provide vaccinations and oh did I mention, we dispense too."
• Collaborative – Pharmacists also felt that they were able to become better collaborators with other health care professionals, as they could now implement their ideas for patients after a discussion with physicians or nurses.
  - "Having APA has strengthened my relationship with the family physicians and my patients…It has streamlined processes and enabled me to empower patients to make changes quickly to manage their health needs."
• Personal – On an individual level several of the pharmacists also mentioned an increase in their confidence in their abilities.
  - "I feel like I am able to use my professional judgment to the best of my abilities."

Implications:

• Pharmacists in Alberta who apply for their APA are challenged by many aspects of the process, on personal, professional and patient-care levels.
• Despite the hurdles, all of our respondents do not regret applying for their APA.
• This information is of value, in particular, to pharmacists considering applying. It can give them reassurance with respect to their hesitations in applying.
  - "It’s funny…I am on a roll now…It has taken me a year to build trust with these drs…the study has helped! We have made inroads…and there is more collaboration now…2 drs this week told me they were comfortable with me prescribing for any of their patients and they trusted me…I am still cautious…as I don’t want to take over refilling everything for these patients...but it is good to have freedom and trust."
• Future Work:
  - We are interested in comparing these results to pharmacists who have not applied for APA.
  - We believe there may be fundamental differences in the pharmacists who apply and pharmacists who can not overcome the obstacles presented by the application.
  - "I like to provide good care for patients who need it. I’ve always hated knowing what needed to be done and having to say I can’t help."
  - "I am lucky because I am not afraid to try something new and fail. But many won’t even begin to try."

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