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President's Message

Elevate Yourself - Keys to Learning New Skills

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The profession of pharmacy is ever changing to meet the needs of patients and the health care industry. As professionals, we need to equip ourselves with the knowledge and skills to meet these new demands. Elevating yourself through continuing professional development prepares you to reach your full potential in order to seize new opportunities in healthcare. You are ready for the challenge, but you may ask yourself where do I start?

People who are committed to life long learning are more likely to perform better at their job, find a new job or receive a promotion. Elevating yourself takes a commitment and developing habits to ensure you are always learning new skills. There are 4 habits that can influence your continuing learning of new skills.¹

- **Focus on emerging skills.** The pharmacy and healthcare landscape is always changing and the requirements of technicians and pharmacists change with it. Learning the latest skills ensures that you stay relevant in your area of practice. Keep up with hot topics in pharmacy and emerging job opportunities. Once you identify a gap, take advantage of the opportunity to learn a new something new or broaden your expertise.
- **Get synchronous.** Learning on-line or by yourself may cause you to loose motivation and give up on learning. To avoid this, align yourself with others who share the same interest. Forming a study group for technician or pharmacist board certification is one way to stay motivated and ensure your goal is met. This interaction among the group fosters deeper learning and keeps everyone motivated.
- **Implement learning immediately.** Benefit your patients and your organization by acting on the new skills that you have acquired. This can be achieved by finding opportunities to use your new skills. Volunteer to serve on a task force, committee or lead a project.
- **Set a golden benchmark.** You need to have a clear goal in mind of what you want to achieve. It helps if you determine what you want to get out of your professional development plan. Developing a professional objective will help you stay focused as you learn. Learning is a life long process and your goals are likely to change over time as you achieve them and determine the next one.

Commit to Continuing Professional Development

Having served as the Director of Educational Affairs Division, I appreciate the importance of Continuing Professional Development for technicians and pharmacists. This can be achieved through various avenues such as on line or live continuing education (CE) activities, attending professional organization meetings like the ICHP Spring and Annual Meetings or ASHP Midyear and Summer Meetings, or obtaining advance certifications through the Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB) or the Board of Pharmacy Specialties (BPS).

Obtaining continuing education credits is only the first step of continuing professional development. In order to achieve the next level, you need to put new information or skills acquired into practice. In order to get started, focus on one or two educational programs that you enjoyed and learned something new. Perhaps it was a

technician-focused session on USP 800 or a guideline update on the management of diabetes. The next step would be to learn more on the topic by finding related CE, journal articles and on-line resources. Once you are armed with the knowledge and skills, it is time to put it into practice by implementing changes or stepping up and volunteering for a committee or project.

Attending professional meetings is a great way to obtain live CE; however there are many more ways to do this. Take advantage of being around colleagues and exchanging new ideas. Some of the best innovations come from talking it through with a colleague who has a similar interest or has already implemented a successful change or program. After attending a particular session you may want to have further discussion with others who attended the same session to gain their insights and share ideas. Many professional meetings are also offering special interest networking sessions such as ambulatory practice, women in leadership, and medication safety just to name a few. This is a great opportunity to meet experts in the field and fosters great discussions.

Board certification is a great avenue for technicians and pharmacists to demonstrate their expertise in a particular area of pharmacy practice. The Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB) now offers an advanced certification for technicians in sterile compounding. Through this advanced certification technicians can learn new knowledge and skills that demonstrate expertise in safe sterile compounding. A commitment to developing advanced skills and qualifications benefits our health-systems and patients.

Another way to elevate yourself is through mentoring. Mentoring is a great way to keep your skills and knowledge sharp. In order to be an effective preceptor of student technicians and pharmacists, preceptors must keep up with the latest skills, regulations, or treatments in their area of expertise. In addition, students bring new information and ideas throughout the learning experience and push you to learn as well.

Elevating yourself can also come through presenting at a state or national meeting or publishing an article. Volunteering to give a presentation or publish an article pushes you to learn all you can about the subject that you will be presenting or writing about. It requires you to perform additional research and dig deeper into the topic so you are prepared to give it your best and address all potential questions that your audience may pose.

Let's not forget to take advantage of opportunities outside of pharmacy or healthcare. All of us have interests outside of work such as playing sports or a musical instrument, gardening, or cooking. Enrolling in classes and participating in activities that are outside of the profession gives you a break from the day-to-day and equips you with new skills that you may not obtain otherwise. In addition, there are valuable lessons that can be translated back into your work. Don't forget to take care of "you", as this allows you to stay sharp, focused and at your peak so you can provide the very best care for patients.

Elevate yourself by developing habits to be a life long learner and commit to continuing professional development. Learning new skills elevates your practice and enables you to take the very best care of your patients.

Reference:

1. Kehoe, M. 4 Habits of people who are always learning new skills. HBR. <https://hbr.org/2018/01/4-habits-of-people-who-are-always-learning-new-skills> January 31, 2018. Accessed March 8, 2018.

