

# Letters *from* Women in Pharmacy

Stories on Integrating Life and Career

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# Dedication

*To the courageous women who want it all:*

We challenge you to always push societal and personal boundaries to define a woman's place on your own terms.



# Acknowledgments

We want to express our sincere appreciation to Daniel Cobaugh, Ruth Bloom, Johnna Hershey, and their colleagues in ASHP's Publishing Division for their guidance and patience throughout the development and production of this book.

Thank you for the generosity of these women who shared their personal and professional vulnerabilities and passions in these letters to benefit current and future leaders in pharmacy.

## A Note from the Editors

The vision for this book is to support successful women leaders through the power of personal stories. By creating an awareness of the daily struggles and resilience of a cross-section of ASHP member leaders, current and future generations of women may identify themselves in these stories and find encouragement for their own leadership journey.



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# Preface

The ASHP 2016 Women in Pharmacy Leadership Steering Committee's recommendation to ASHP to "proactively collect and share stories, case studies and scenarios of how women have addressed gender, workplace, work-life integration, and leadership challenges" was the impetus and stimulus for this *Letters* publication. The power of this publication comes from each letter writer's personal journey, each unique yet similar, in reaching for her potential as both a pharmacist and as a woman. The letters collectively emphasize the numerous successful approaches to blending a career and personal life while learning and applying various leadership styles.

We (Sara, Susan, and Hannah) as co-editors sought out women pharmacists who bring out a multiplicity of voices in age, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, practice settings, and work and personal experiences. A strong common theme heard by the Steering Committee was the need to learn more about integration of career and life. We sought women who represented a variety of personal life circumstances, such as single/married, with and without children, divorced, single mom, stay-at-home dad, and diverse lifestyles to cast a wide net to benefit our readers.

With our colleagues, co-workers, and friends, we too often focus on portraying our successes, while minimizing or hiding our fears, challenges, failures, or pain. As life happens, you will find journeys that include health challenges, job layoffs, changing jobs, overcoming humble beginnings, going back to school, and benefiting from the resilience of others, such as having a mother who survived the Auschwitz WWII concentration camp. We asked these contributors to share advice on overcoming gender-limiting and societal assumptions, self-doubt, guilt, imposter syndrome, rejection, failures, and #MeToo moments. You will find how the value of saying both "yes" and "no," the decision to risk change, the value of seizing opportunities, and letting go of the pharmacist perfectionist in the other aspects of life are beneficial. These letter writers also share how mentors, networking, volunteering in professional organizations, and investment of time and attention into relationships outside of their friends and family have positively shaped their lives and careers.

This *Letters from Women in Pharmacy: Stories on Integrating Life and Career* joins ASHP's other books of letters: *Letters to a Young Pharmacist: Sage Advice on Life & Career from Extraordinary Pharmacists* (mid-career to veterans) (Susan A. Cantrell, Sara J. White, and Bruce E. Scott), *Letters from Rising Pharmacy*

*Stars: Advice on Creating and Advancing Your Career in a Changing Profession* (10+ years of practice) (Susan A. Cantrell and Sara J. White), and *Letters from Pharmacy Residents: Navigating Your Career* (Sara J. White, Harold N. Godwin, and Susan Teil Boyer). These books were the brainchild of Susan Cantrell who had read Ellyn Spragins' books that featured authors writing letters to their younger selves. Susan talked to Sara about using the concept for pharmacy, which has resulted in this family of letters books.

We hope these stories, journeys, and practical advice will help you realize that others support and understand the challenges of your journey as you push through any guilt, self-doubt, and the inevitable obstacles to having a satisfying career and personal life.

*Enjoy,*

*Sara, Susan, and Hannah*

# Introduction

## Imperative for Change

The Pharmacy Workforce Center commissioned the 2014 National Pharmacist Workforce Study that revealed, for the first time in history, pharmacy shifted from a male-dominated to a female-dominated profession.<sup>1</sup> In addition, over the last 20 years, pharmacy school enrollment of women has increased, representing 62.5% of all first professional degree students, and 52.6% of all full-time graduate pharmacy students.<sup>2</sup> With women graduating from pharmacy school at higher rates and men retiring at a much faster rate than women, it became more apparent that ASHP should study the potential implications of this shift.

Although the data show that women represent the majority of healthcare practitioners today, they still occupy far fewer leadership positions in healthcare at large, particularly at senior leadership levels. A separate study on women and leadership, conducted by the Pew Research Center, found that key leadership traits such as intelligence and capacity for innovation are indistinguishable from men and women.<sup>3</sup>

## ASHP Women in Pharmacy Leadership Initiative

ASHP sought to respond to the evolving environment to anticipate the needs and changing dynamics of the pharmacy workforce. In 2015, the Women in Pharmacy Leadership Initiative was launched with the Women in Pharmacy Leadership Steering Committee. The Committee members (both women and men) represented a diverse group of pharmacy leaders from a variety of practice settings and positions in a wide range of career stages. They were charged with exploring possible recommendations to support women in achieving pharmacy leadership skills and roles at every level and practice setting. Through various means, such as empirical studies, focus groups, town hall meetings, and open discussion sessions, the Committee formed a set of recommendations focused on leveraging the change in demographics as a business and leadership opportunity for the profession.

***The ASHP Board of Directors in 2016 approved the Steering Committee report, which contained the following series of recommendations.***

**Recommendations to ASHP:**

1. Allocate resources strategically to create and sustain specific ASHP services including meetings and education, skills building programs, networking forums to support career development strategies, and other resources.
2. Identify and share strategies for successful work–life integration with members. Work–life integration is an ongoing issue for all pharmacy professionals (men and women).
3. Highlight the differences between role models, mentors, coaches, and sponsors and foster the development of these relationships among its members. Specifically, the concept of sponsorship should be introduced and nurtured between early female careerists and successful women leaders.
4. Develop a strategy to collect baseline and ongoing metrics regarding women in leadership positions within the pharmacy profession. Data exist within the general workforce and within healthcare but not within the pharmacy profession.
5. Proactively collect and share stories, case studies, and scenarios of how women have addressed gender, workplace, work–life integration, and leadership challenges.
6. Assess volunteer, meeting, and governance policies and practices to support successful engagement and participation among ASHP members.
7. Share successful pharmacy employer policies and practices that reflect supportive work environments.
8. Study pharmacy-specific career inflection points including individual, organizational, and societal factors and promote these leverage points.
9. Cultivate career aspirations of early careerists.
10. Facilitate leadership development throughout all functional roles (e.g., clinical, administrative, academic).
11. Actively recruit women into its elected and appointed leadership and support their advancements by recognizing their volunteer contributions and achievements.
12. Support ASHP state affiliates and colleges of pharmacy in disseminating and supporting the Women in Pharmacy Leadership recommendations at the school, local, and state level.

**Recommendations to Those Seeking Leadership Roles:**

1. Develop a strategic career plan focused on personal skill development, and meet with senior leaders to voice aspirations.
2. Seek applicable education and training (e.g., advanced degrees, residency training, skills-based leadership training) to support career trajectory.
3. Recognize that one's career progression is a journey and that each transition entails a new level of commitment and dedication to work-life integration.
4. Expand a network of seasoned practitioners both male and female.
5. Identify mentors and sponsors and nurture productive relationships.
6. Be assertive in negotiating, designing, and applying work models that meet the needs of employers as well as individual professional and personal needs for work-life balance.

**Recommendations to Current Pharmacy Leaders:**

1. For individuals who are in the position of mentoring and sponsoring others, actively identify mentees and nurture those who would benefit from sponsorship, working together to create a personal development plan.
2. Promote key factors that create positive career changes such as advanced degrees and residency training (career inflection points) among mentees.
3. Encourage aspiring leaders to seek and take on visible, important, and complex roles and projects.
4. Make introductions of aspiring leaders with other influential leaders.
5. Provide specialized coaching and give feedback.
6. Support the expansion of professional networks of emerging leaders.
7. Share profiles, stories, and recommendations of successful female pharmacy leaders with others.

**Recommendations to Employer Organizations/Pharmacy Departments:**

1. Cultivate career aspirations of female early careerists.
2. Encourage early careerists to proactively manage career plans.
3. Develop mentoring, coaching, and sponsorship programs.
4. Promote active assumption of sponsorship activities to advance aspiring leaders.
5. Identify challenges that prevent aspiring women leaders from pursuing advanced career goals.

6. Create and expand residency programs and other skills-based formal education and training programs, including leadership training, that have been shown to be instrumental in career success.
7. Examine and consider implementation of organizational policies to provide support to working professionals including flexible hours, job sharing, etc.
8. Offer and/or support education, training programs, and personal development opportunities to build success skills.

The work of the Committee and subsequent recommendations became the catalyst for other activities in support of the Women in Pharmacy Leadership Initiative. A variety of communication channels and facilitation methods have since been used to establish ongoing services and member engagement. Networking sessions at ASHP national meetings connect those interested in the Initiative and facilitate mentorship/sponsorship, and educational sessions on leadership topics keep members apprised of the unique needs of women and those in leadership positions.

***To communicate the progress of the Initiative and to serve as a home for those seeking to learn more and engage in the conversation, the following were created:***

- A web page (<https://www.ashp.org/Pharmacy-Practice/Resource-Centers/Leadership/Women-In-Pharmacy-Leadership>)
- A dedicated online discussion forum—the ASHP Connect Women in Pharmacy Leadership Community

***Information sharing has also increased to continue to raise awareness and promote member activities through:***

- Podcasts
- Newsletters such as Intersections (<http://www.ashpintersections.org/>)
- Social media

In continuing ASHP's tradition of learning and inspiration through engagement and education, a commentary on Women in Pharmacy Leadership was commissioned for the *American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy* to contribute to the body of knowledge on the topic.

This broad and in-depth engagement strategy to stimulate courageous conversations about gender diversity and leadership needs was highly successful for ASHP. Utilizing a variety of communication channels and facilitation methods yielded strong consensus around the needs of current and future leaders of the

profession. New programs created during this initiative have been established as ongoing services, and the uptake of these services by ASHP members have been significant. This initiative contributes to ASHP's goal to support and encourage our members through their personal and professional leadership journeys.

*Maria Carias and Hannah K. Vanderpool*

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