

# LETTERS FROM LEADERS IN PHARMACY

Advice from Pharmacy Leadership  
Academy Graduates, Faculty, and  
Mentors

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## DEDICATION

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This book is dedicated to the current and aspiring pharmacy leaders who are creating future pharmacy services for patients, allowing pharmacists and technicians to practice at the top of their license.



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Welcome to *Letters from Leaders in Pharmacy*—it joins the family of other ASHP published *Letters* books, all of which share personal stories and lessons learned during the writer's pharmacy journey. As this book title indicates, the letter contributors have completed the Pharmacy Leadership Academy (PLA) or are faculty or participant mentors, so you will receive varied practical life, career, and leadership advice. Completing the PLA confers a Diplomat Status (DPLA) and makes one eligible for several on-line masters programs; some of these writers have taken advantage of this opportunity. These contributors have careers that span several decades of practice and include not only pharmacists but also a pharmacy technician. Some of the graduates completed the PLA as part of their PGY2 health-system pharmacy administration residency program, which leads to robust sharing, learning, and networking within each group of participants.

As we consider leadership, we need to keep in mind that pharmacy is a *science*.

As pharmacists, we must be medication therapy perfectionists because if we allow a mistake or a misjudgment to occur, it could harm a patient. Based on our scientific education, we are the drug experts that patients depend on to keep them safe and healthy.

Leadership, however, is an *art*, the opposite of pharmacy, and thus a challenge for pharmacists who become leaders. Simply stated, leadership is not only ensuring that things are done correctly (management) but deciding the right things to do given constantly changing circumstances and implementing them. Hence, to be effective as a leader, you must take calculated risks often without all the information you would like, function without detailed direction from your superiors, deal with organizational politics, work without needing personal validation from your staff, and deal with human resource matters such as firing an employee. You will experience some undesirable outcomes that should be viewed as learning opportunities. What isn't well understood is that every pharmacist is actually already a manager, because the definition of management is ensuring that things are done correctly. Keep in mind that every pharmacist, in addition to being a manager, needs to be a "Little 'l' Leader" on their shift or in their practice with you as their "Big 'L' Leader" having a title such as Director, Chief Pharmacy Officer, Clinical Manager, etc. It might be helpful to think about having two "hats"—your pharmacist hat and your leader hat, so you change hats when appropriate to channel your thinking and approach.

These letters will allow you to benefit from others' leadership journeys and lessons learned. As personal stories they are very practical, demonstrating actual situations, and thus contain powerful lessons.

Some of the inspiring leadership journeys described in this book include seeking a leadership role when no longer feeling challenged in practice; learning as an introvert to become comfortable with extrovert behaviors needed in leadership roles; adjusting expectations and putting yourself out there when things don't go as planned; and adapting to change and growing as a leader along with the evolution of pharmacy services over time.

Through their letters, the authors provide valuable advice on integrating career and life goals, embracing vulnerability, developing trust within your team, leading with integrity and compassion, defining and living by your leadership values, setting an example as a leader

when dealing with crises, and recognizing the value of involvement in professional organizational leadership.

You will also find many lessons in the letters:

- In the pharmacy context, learning the meaning of leadership and what success looks like.
- Realizing the value of being nimble and understanding the importance of culture and organizational design.
- Being in leadership for the right reasons.
- Learning that empowering your staff entails understanding how the work gets done.
- Believing in yourself.
- Not allowing fear to dictate your thinking.
- Remembering that persistence pays off and letting no obstacle stand in your way.
- Being flexible and adapting to change.
- Learning to expect the unexpected.
- Observing other leaders and learning from what works and what doesn't work.
- Appreciating the value of mentors.
- Realizing the value of a network.
- Handling your emotional reactions to change by developing a philosophical stance toward failure and seeing it as a gift.
- Solidifying the boss relationship or managing up.
- And many more

*Enjoy and benefit from these colleagues,*

*Sara, Susan, and Bruce*

Barbara B. Nussbaum, BS Pharm, PhD, Vice President for Research and Education  
Stephanie D. Brown, MEd, Director of Programs, ASHP Foundation

### Pharmacy Leadership Academy

*“The academy helped me solidify my leadership foundation and provided me with fundamental tools to be successful in my work environment.”*

—Cedric Terrell (PLA 2011)

The Pharmacy Leadership Academy (PLA) is an online, year-long, rigorous program with a comprehensive curriculum designed to enhance the leadership competence of pharmacists and the pharmacy workforce. Recognized globally as a unique leadership development opportunity, existing and emerging leaders from every practice setting and career stage, from residents to seasoned pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, have graduated from the program and make up a rich network of over 850 alumni-leaders.

*“The courses were tailor-made for pharmacy leaders and the professors were able to provide mentorship on the challenges I faced every day.”*

—Julianna Burton (PLA 2016)

The curriculum is designed to be results-focused development: each course overlays individual skills’ development and addresses aspects of leading the pharmacy enterprise and organizational effectiveness. Joann Moore (PLA 2013) shared that the content allowed her to be, “Better positioned to engage in leadership conversations, spanning strategic goals to finance to patient safety.” Through close collaboration with our faculty teams of pharmacy leaders, the program is continually updated to prepare leaders to meet contemporary health-care opportunities and challenges.

#### **It’s not easy but possible.**

As described by Sara Nawar (PLA 2016), part of a cohort from the Dubai Health Authority, “This program made me realize that I can do many things that I didn’t believe I can do.” While in the PLA, despite competing responsibilities and engaging with peers in different time zones, Sara was able to find the time in her schedule to “work in teams ‘from abroad,’ share and learn experiences” while also working to “fulfill my duties in the hospital, home and other social obligations.”

#### **Leadership is the key to practice excellence and innovation.<sup>1</sup>**

The PLA was the first program offered through the Center for Health-System Pharmacy Leadership (Center). The Center was created in 2006 by ASHP and the ASHP Foundation Board of Directors in response to recommendations from a member task force and building upon the results of Sara White’s Scholar-in-Residence research project. Through generous support from Amgen and focused efforts of a core team, led by Richard S. Walling, Director of the Center, Stephen J. Allen, CEO of the ASHP Foundation, and Sharon Murphy Enright, External Course Master, the PLA was created. In collaboration with a dedicated group of

faculty, they created the program's curriculum and generated content for its 2008 launch. The inaugural class of 86 students was provided a robust set of distance-learning modules, inclusive of independent study, web presentations, teleconferences, and assessments.

## The PLA—Innovating and Evolving

As the PLA was building its reputation as a premier leadership development opportunity for pharmacy, the 2010 ASHP Pharmacy Practice Model Initiative (now, the ASHP Practice Advancement Initiative 2030) reaffirmed the importance of leadership for the advancement of pharmacy practice and patient care. With an updated curriculum, the program was moved to a new learning management system in 2011 and again in 2015, providing effective tools and techniques to enhance collaboration, engagement, and peer-to-peer learning. Anthony Scott (PLA 2017) shared, "I was able to learn even more from my peers and the PLA faculty, which reinforced that personal development for me."

In concert with the other 2011 program changes, the ASHP Foundation established partnerships with academic institutions to award graduate credits for completion of the PLA to provide a gateway to Masters' degrees. Like many alumni, Felida "Bibi" Wishart (PLA 2016) went on to complete an MBA, sharing, "PLA laid the groundwork and positioned me very well for success in this program." The arrangements with graduate programs has provided enormous value to practitioners who recognize the need for new and practical leadership skills and the advantage of an advanced degree in an increasingly competitive healthcare setting.

## The Impact of the PLA on Participants and Practice

*"I am able to work strategically."*

—Jennifer Buiva (PLA 2014)

While putting out fires is typical at the frontline of healthcare, leaders must effectively communicate, build high-performing teams, and manage the complexity of care and our systems. These are some of the key leadership competencies prioritized by health-system pharmacy leaders and that alumni report enhancing through the PLA. Alumni share that they not only develop their leadership skills but attribute career advancement to their completion of the PLA. In a recent survey, over half of respondents reported assuming greater leadership roles, including promotions. A growing number of leaders send their staff teams through the PLA, developing their bench strength and succession plans, and the majority of recent participants report that they were referred to the PLA by an alumni.

*"Ability to embrace change and to motivate others to embrace change."*

—Suzanne Turner (PLA 2011)

PLA alumni bring back new knowledge to facilitate the development of others. Zack Dumont (PLA 2015) started a journal club on leadership topics at his organization. From implementing new services, transforming processes and systems, to initiating pharmacy services in U.A.E. or building a new hospital—alumni report they leveraged the competencies they enhanced during the PLA and through their PLA network. The unprecedented

COVID-19 pandemic provided the 2019-2020 class, real-time application of leading with agility in a global environment filled with volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

**It is all about people.**

As shared by Neal Walker (PLA 2009), “The first few months in this program, I learned that it really is all about people and personal interactions. We don’t have to be the one who does it all, but we do have to empower and develop the talented team of professionals that we work with.” Like the quotes we pulled for this introduction, the letters in this book are a snapshot of the many stories from and about the people—alumni, faculty, colleagues, families, patients, and communities that have benefited from the PLA, past and future.

## Reference

1. S.J. Allen and D.C. Robinson, Proposal to Amgen. Creating a passion for pharmacy leadership: A solutions-based initiative. 12 August 2004.

