

# Life as a professional person



## LESSONS FOR SUCCESS IN TIMES OF TURMOIL

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Most hospital pharmacists now have a deeper understanding than they did a year or two ago of the sweeping transformation taking place in the hospital industry. This enhanced perception comes from experiencing firsthand significant changes in hospital operations. At last month's ASHP Midyear Clinical Meeting, one of the most common themes of corridor conversation was the personal fallout from hospital retrenchment and consolidation. The talk was colored by emotions ranging from depression over job loss to exhilaration over an important role in recasting an institution. Some hospital pharmacists have prepared themselves well to thrive in the current environment, and their example offers lessons for all who are developing personal strategies for coping with the turmoil around them.

*Lesson one: Understand the trends in health care delivery.* The most important thing pharmacists can do to prepare for the future is to place their career development plans in context with the overall direction of health care. The elements of that direction are clear — managing costs, improving quality, integrating the components of the health system — but how these broad imperatives will be translated into change at the individual practice site is often difficult to decipher. Publications such as *Hospitals & Health Networks* and *Modern Healthcare* are excellent sources of information about how institutions are positioning themselves for the future. Pharmacists who understand these trends will have a better grasp of their professional options.

*Lesson two: Remember why people need pharmacists.* The specific job that a pharmacist has today may or may not exist next year, but there will be no diminution of the need for pharmacists. The guiding maxims of pharmaceutical care — people have problems in the use of medications, and they need pharmacists to help them with those problems — will grow in relevance as drug therapy becomes more complex, as new medications are moved through regulatory review more rapidly, as more products are switched to nonprescription status,

and as pharmaceutical promotions become embellished with pharmacoeconomic analyses.

Overlaying these factors will be increased risk of medication misadventures that stem from cutting staff, combining the operations of merged facilities, piloting new patient care models, and implementing new information systems. Above the din, hospital pharmacists must speak clearly and forcefully about the needs of patients for safe, effective, and cost-conscious drug therapy. And they must be prepared to help the institution find new and better ways to satisfy those needs.

*Lesson three: Maintain current skills and develop new abilities.* What do you do best at work now? The chances are good that your set of skills will still be in demand somewhere, even if they are not at your current place of employment. Employers will expect you to have full command of basic pharmaceutical knowledge about the use of medications.

What new areas of health care and pharmacy interest you? It is never too late to develop new abilities. At educational programs such as the Midyear Clinical Meeting, it is routine to find mid- and late-career practitioners taking the first steps to learn about new areas of knowledge, often because they see an opportunity for an expanded contribution at their place of practice.

Do you have weaknesses in human relations, analytical thinking, and communication skills? If so, give priority to correcting them. The best opportunities await pharmacists who have conspicuous strengths in these areas.

*Lesson four: Be open to career opportunities in other components of health systems.* Hospital pharmacy is the primary area of recruitment for pharmacists in home infusion therapy (to cite just one example), where they often have a level of responsibility for the outcome of drug therapy that surpasses that of pharmacists in other practice settings. Hospital pharmacists will find a growing number of opportunities of this nature with their current employers as acute care is linked more directly with ambulatory care and home care. Especially in demand will be practitioners who are quick studies, self-confident, committed to high standards of excellence, and experienced in managing drug therapy.

Hospitals are scrambling to realign themselves in the health care system. The hospital industry as we know it will shrink markedly and become more integrated with other components of managed care over the next few years. This process will be painful for many who work for hospitals, including pharmacists. Nevertheless, hospital pharmacists can be confident of a bright future if they understand the trends in health care delivery, if they think carefully about the fundamental role of their profession, and if they assess honestly their personal strengths. Those who have a high tolerance for uncertainty will have an added edge.

