



David A. Zilz

The Pharmacist–Physician Relationship: It's about Trust

Soon after meeting DZ, as he is known to many, it will become clear to you that this is a very proud and passionate person with a wide range of interests. He takes almost as much pride in his commercial driver's license as he does in his pharmacy license. Dave is as passionate about forestry and the environment as he is about pharmacy, health care, and leadership.

Dave spent his entire career in leadership positions at the University of Wisconsin Hospital. Not only was he successful in his roles at the University, he also provided leadership to many other organizations including the University Healthsystem Consortium and the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists. The educational model for training pharmacists for practice and advanced training for leadership is also one of his passions. His strong support of uniting the education mission of the University of Wisconsin School of Pharmacy with the pharmacy practice mission of the University of Wisconsin Hospital Department of Pharmacy has certainly produced skilled practitioners and leaders who have improved the care of patients. Most who know him well would say that his investing in the current and future leaders through mentorship will be one of the cornerstones of his legacy. And as you might imagine, he is a very thoughtful leader.

Dave received his bachelor of science and master of science degrees from the University of Wisconsin. When asked to reflect on his career and wisdom to pass on to current and future pharmacy leaders, his message was clear: *The pharmacist–physician relationship is important, and the relationship is about trust.*



Dear Young Pharmacist,

A physician leader stated to me “We don’t need more spectators! If you are here when I am here (seven days a week), are willing to get your hands dirty as I frequently do, and if I can count on you to follow up in a reliable way every time a drug decision is made, we will get along just fine and be a great team.” I understood exactly what he needed in a pharmacist partner: you have to be accountable, accessible, and graciously assertive representing all areas of pharmacy practice.

One constant in your career will be a relationship with physicians and the medical community. The relationship is extremely important because almost everything you do in practice or policy development regarding patients’ use of medications will require some level of partnership with physicians. You will learn that the pharmacy and medical professions share common values, beliefs, and philosophies of practice in achieving optimum outcomes for the dollars spent on drug therapies. Of course, the emotions of this relationship will span a continuum of frustration during times of disagreement to elation due to great patient care resulting from exceptional teamwork. You bring tremendous value to this relationship, and you own at least 50 percent of the frustration and the elation resulting from the relationship.

In the 1960s, I began my journey of understanding and valuing the pharmacist–physician relationship and its impact on the success of pharmacy practice and services. Winston Durant, our Director of Pharmacy at the University of Wisconsin, believed that pharmacists working directly with physicians in patient care areas to determine the medication needs of patients and managing the medication-use system would improve medication safety and increase nursing efficiency. This was clearly the right model for us. It was also very clear to Mr. Durant that this model’s success required an understanding of physicians, their thought processes, and practice to partner with them and fulfill the patients’ medication needs. He strongly believed and instilled in many of us that a good pharmacist–physician relationship is an absolute necessity to achieve the optimum use of medications. Since early in my career, my assignments enabled me to work with physicians in all practice settings at all times of the day and night and especially to