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Life Is Never What You Expect It to Be

Felicity describes how unexpected events, such as an auto accident, may alter your life and career. She shares her experiences of moving toward her ultimate goal of a leadership position and overcoming feelings of being ill prepared. Her personal involvement in becoming engaged in the political process as well as requesting a salary increase and promotion to Chief Pharmacy Officer are examples of successful efforts in getting out of your comfort zone and taking control of your life and career.

Felicity A. E. Homsted is currently Chief Pharmacy Officer and Residency Program Director, having previously been Director of Pharmacy and Residency Program Director, Penobscot Community Health Care (PCHC), Bangor, Maine. She practiced clinically as a decentralized cardiac pharmacist at Eastern Maine Medical Center in Bangor. Felicity has served as President of the Maine Society of Health-System Pharmacists and Vice Chair, Apexus Federally Qualified Health Center Advisory Council. She received her PharmD degree from Idaho State University.

Felicity's advice is: ***Remember that despite our best laid plans, there are bumps in the road both literally and figuratively. How you choose to handle these setbacks will define you and your career.***

 ***Dear Young Pharmacist,***

Life is never what you expect it to be. The way you handle these bumps in the road will define you and your career. In February 2012, I was excitedly driving home after finishing my shift at the hospital. My husband and I were planning to attend the musical "Boing Boing." I noticed the lights of an approaching vehicle on an intersecting road, but I thought nothing of it because of the stop sign and ample

distance between us. However, the other driver never touched his brakes. The impact sent my SUV spinning into the middle of the road, unmovable, with air bags deployed and the rear end destroyed. The other driver's full-size pickup was left looking more like an accordion. In those moments, I had no way of knowing what was to come.

When I returned to work 3 days later, I felt like I was starting over again as a new pharmacist. Everything that had come so easily to me was now a struggle. After 6 years in practice, I questioned whether 300 mg of trazadone was an appropriate dose—I had no concept of a reasonable dose for the drug. I had suffered a significant traumatic brain injury, even though I did not lose consciousness. In neuro-psychometric testing, I rated exceptional in all areas except attention and recall. In these domains, I demonstrated impairment with below average scores. My IQ placed me in the 96th percentile, but I felt like a goldfish.

Within a few months, it became clear I could not safely remain in direct patient care. The potential of a forgotten step harming someone in my care left me wondering if I could even remain in the profession. I found a part-time position as Residency Program Director at a federally qualified health center (FQHC). Initially, this job was in addition to my role as a decentralized cardiac pharmacist. I learned to slow down when working at the hospital, methodically checking and double checking to prevent mistakes. By the fall, I was hired at PCHC as a full-time Director of Pharmacy and Residency Program Director. I no longer worried about inadvertently harming my patients, but now I had a new host of challenges. None of this was easy; life rarely is.

My memory has improved somewhat thanks to donepezil, when I remember to take it. I have learned to pace myself and rely on the team approach in balancing strengths and weaknesses. Viewing setbacks and having a plan for a comeback is critical. When you get knocked down, rise back up and take the time and effort to rebuild. There is great joy in success through perseverance.

Pharmacists are detail-oriented planners. Prior to my accident, I had my entire career mapped out—bachelor's degree, doctorate, board certification, clinical specialty, manager position, MBA, and finally director. Becoming a Director of Pharmacy had been my ultimate career goal; there I was, 6 years into my career, feeling very ill prepared. Fortunately, my boss, PCHC's Chief Operating Officer, encouraged me when I questioned my readiness for the role. But there are many paths to take and more than one right answer. What is important is to have a vision for where you are going and what you want to achieve. As you are presented with opportunities, consider them in light of where you hope to end up and ask if they will help or hinder you in getting there.