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Having One Foot in the Clinical Realm and One Foot in the Operational Realm

In reflecting on her career thus far, Liz offers advice such as build your village, it's ok *not* to know, you might fail, you should learn how to tell a story and teach others how to be storytellers, and you should not turn down unique opportunities. Liz practices clinically and is a leader demonstrating that your career doesn't have to be one dimensional.

Elisabeth (Liz) M. Simmons is currently Clinical Pharmacy Manager and postgraduate years (PGY) 1 and 2 Pediatrics Residency Director (RPD) at Children's National Medical Center. Previously, she was Clinical Pharmacy Manager and PGY2 Pediatrics RPD at the University of Chicago Medicine. She received her PharmD from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Liz completed pediatric specialty and pharmacy practice residencies at the Medical University of South Carolina.

Liz's advice is: ***Look for a boss who will serve as your coach, mentor, and finally your sponsor. Have open discussions about your needs and expectations, and don't be afraid to occasionally ask for what you need as a professional.***



Dear Young Pharmacist,

Welcome to the profession of pharmacy—it's a great place to be! As a profession, we have never been more perfectly poised and positioned to become a true primary care provider for all of our patients. Drug and healthcare costs are on the rise, and insurance companies have taken note, demanding not just provision of services but also *quality* provision of services. Additionally, safety continues to be a huge issue, with major steps needed to ensure that we do no harm. All pharmacists must work toward incorporating best practices into their day-to-day practice at the frontline and also for all the patients we serve.

As I reflect back on the almost 10 years I have spent as a clinical practitioner and now clinical leader, I have learned a lot of lessons along the way. The following are a few of the highlights.

Build your village. As a clinician leader, I wear a lot of hats—clinician, boss, RPD, scheduler, troubleshooter, party planner, mentor, and mentee. You name it; I've tried the hat on for a minute. One of the best ways to be successful when wearing multiple hats is to make sure that you have a solid team of practitioners and leaders you can trust to help you build and grow your vision. As you build your practice, this will include not only your co-workers but all members of a patient care services team. We can no longer afford to practice in professional silos. As you take on your frontline leadership roles, you'll want to build important connections, knowing which nursing manager is your go-to for developing quality services on your unit, who on the pharmacy team can help you solve an electronic medical administration record (eMAR) problem, and how to best implement a new clinical service. Additionally, you must build trusting relationships not only with your co-workers but with those to whom you report.

Your village is your sounding board, and those people will always have your back. Sometimes they will challenge you, but that is important to produce the best possible outcome for patient care. Use your village to have open conversations and uninhibited brainstorming sessions. Always keep the patient at the heart of what you do, knowing that it will always produce the best decision.

It's OK to not know. As pharmacists, we are hard-wired to want to provide the quickest, most accurate answer while frequently working independently. As you grow as a leader, you will find that there is not one correct way to solve a problem, and that engaging others in decision-making will almost always result in a better solution. Use the village that you've built to group problem solve, hold uninhibited brainstorming sessions, and allow for some conflict. Remember you may not know the best way to get from A to B, but your village can help you get there.

Just as I did not always know every answer to a specific clinical question off-hand, I do not always know the answer to every leadership dilemma. What I *do* promise is that in pulling together we can work through it. For a successful relationship, we must be honest with each other, enabling us to build a stronger path moving forward. You should have at least one person in your village who you can drop your guard around—someone you feel completely comfortable with and trust to bounce ideas off of. This person will help you when you need someone to confirm that you're doing the right thing, or that you're forging the correct path moving forward. It is infinitely easier to make difficult, unknown decisions when you have someone who can help you vet your thought process, and who won't hold your decisions against you when you occasionally take a misstep. Speaking of missteps, my next section is a great seque.