



Hospital Pharmacies Benefit from Practice Advisor Visits

Baseline assessments preparing hospital pharmacies for new licensing and inspections by the College

By Stuart Foxman

As Director of Pharmacy at Bluewater Health, Andrea Wist, RPh, is proud of how the organization is ranked by Accreditation Canada. Bluewater, which operates hospital sites in Sarnia and rural Petrolia, earned an exemplary standing in 2015 for their safety and quality. Yet Wist realizes there are other even more effective ways to evaluate and confirm standards on the pharmacy side of hospital operations.

That's why Wist welcomed a visit earlier this year by practice advisors from the Ontario College of

Pharmacists (OCP). Throughout 2015, the advisors are reaching all of Ontario's hospital pharmacies (about 260 sites) to perform baseline assessments. This is part of the College's preparation in advance of the enactment of legislation to grant OCP the authority to license and inspect pharmacies within public and private hospitals.

"I've been waiting for this," says Wist. "We aspire to excellence in safe medication practices. I want to adhere to standards so people get the right medication at the right time for the right therapy."

The *Safeguarding Health Care Integrity Act, 2014* will allow OCP to set and enforce licensing requirements for hospital pharmacies in the same way the College currently does for community pharmacies. The provisions around OCP's oversight will take effect



Pharmacist Andrea Wist (left) and Pharmacy Technician Norma Hansen (right)

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when the government approves amendments to the *Drug and Pharmacies Regulation Act*.

To get ready, OCP developed draft hospital pharmacy inspection criteria, and did pilot assessments in 2014 to ensure the criteria supported hospital practice. For this year’s visits, OCP practice advisors spend one day per hospital site, working with pharmacy staff, others involved in the medication management system, and senior

hospital executives. The focus is on touring the facility and discussing pharmacy processes and procedures, especially areas with the greatest risk for patient and public safety.

How have the site visits helped? “It’s not about a number or a score. It’s an opportunity for quality improvement, guided by legislation, professional standards and best practices,” says Rene Thibault, RPh, Professional Practice Leader,

Pharmacy at Providence Care in Kingston. “If you approach it with that understanding, the result will be improved medication management practices and exceptional patient care.”

IMPACT OF ADVISORS FELT WIDELY

The hospital pharmacists who have undergone the assessments say the advisors provided value in highlighting ways to perform better, and also in verifying the effectiveness of current standards.

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Pharmacy Technician Norma Hansen

Thibault calls the practice advisors highly supportive in providing guidance. Some ideas were so easy to implement that she could do them immediately. For example, at the Providence Care pharmacy all the injections had been stored together. The advisors suggested that the pharmacy separate the long-acting depot injections.

“That was a five-minute fix, yet our medication safety practices were improved just by having the advisor look at our shelves,” says Thibault.

Norma Hansen, RPhT, a Senior Pharmacy Technician at Bluewater Health, says she and Wist were impressed by the scope of the assessment. Before the site visit, they and a staff pharmacist went over more than 400 self-assessment questions, touching on everything from handoffs between shifts, to policies on care and maintenance of automated dispensing units, to sterile compounding.

During the assessment, Hansen was impressed by the extreme thoroughness of the practice advisors. They looked at the refrigerators where drugs were

stored to check on temperatures, they took down bottles to look at expiry dates, they reviewed the narcotic transaction process –from doctor’s orders to the pharmacy to nursing and administration at the patient’s bedside – and they talked to nurses as well.

“I was surprised at how well-versed the advisors were in our policies. They knew everything,” says Hansen.

She notes too that the advisor process enhances and compliments other types of reviews, like those of Accreditation Canada. Regarding medication management standards, “OCP was much more detailed,” Hansen says.

“My focus has always been on raising the level of practice in any way possible. Having OCP come in has raised awareness of what’s required,” adds Ryan Itterman,



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Pharmacist Ryan Itterman

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Pharmacist Rene Thibault



RPh, Regional Director, Pharmacy Services at Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance and Alexandra Marine and General Hospital.

Following the assessment, Itterman and his team developed an action plan, with over 100 short-term and long-term items.

“A lot of them are reviewing what’s in place, or updates to procedures. For many of the items, a member of our team was already aware, but the assessment was a good way to force us to reflect and look at everything in greater detail. You have to validate; you can’t just trust that a procedure is in place.”

A FOUNDATION FOR COLLABORATION

The assessments were valued beyond their ability to encourage improvements or provide validation. To understand the full importance of the visits, hospital pharmacists say that it’s important to consider the environment in which they operate.

Thibault has worked at Providence for three years, and in hospital pharmacies for 32. She suggests that in meeting and enhancing standards, hospital pharmacies face different considerations than their community counterparts.

Pharmacy procedures and medication management practices impact many other departments and programs within the hospital. So improvements can not always be self-contained, says Thibault. Some need to be addressed as organizational initiatives and require group efforts. That’s one reason why she welcomed the practice advisors; in a way, their efforts could help support collaboration in key areas.

“It required us to critically examine every one of our pharmacy procedures, policies and processes,” says Thibault, “and also our relationships with other disciplines in the hospital as they apply to medication management.”

For example, a broad initiative like hazardous medication procedures affects areas ranging from nursing to housekeeping, far beyond the pharmacy. Oversight of the procedures falls under yet another area, occupational health and safety.

“The assessment empowered us to reach out to the rest of the organization and make this a priority for the overall safety of patients and staff,” says Thibault.

She says the advisors were beneficial in both reinforcing existing standards and defining new ones. “We want to elevate our practice, so it’s important to understand what processes to put in place,” says Thibault. “Emerging standards can be a valuable planning tool,



i.e. what resources do we need, how should we rethink pharmacy processes, and who do we need to work with.”

Thibault points to a new hospital site that will combine the current two sites in 2017. “When we move, we’ll have a new drug distribution system. The OCP assessment criteria provides the framework to guide our policy and procedure development, and to support and maybe even influence decisions we’re making.”

Itterman, likewise, sees the value of the practice assessment as his hospital looks at a possible new facility to make sterile IV preparations. “That’s a longer-term plan,” he says, “but the assessment validated that this is an area we need to look at, and provided guidance on the standards.”

Any future role by OCP in licensing and inspecting hospital pharmacies is important from a compliance standpoint. But the weight of OCP’s processes could pay greater dividends.

As Wist says, after the assessments she felt greater authority over the policies and procedures she sets in her hospital. She also knew, from their reaction, that the hospital leaders respected the pharmacy for meeting high standards. More than that, says Wist, “We’re recognized even more seriously by the organization as an area that needs support to adhere to these standards.” 