

Island Health F.Y.I.

Island Health Pharmacists: improving patient care at the bedside and from the research lab

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ISLAND-WIDE - When an 81-year-old woman came into the Royal Jubilee Hospital emergency department in February with dizziness, it didn't take long for the pharmacist on the team to figure out it was caused by the pain medication she was taking. In fact, one in eight patients comes to emergency because of a medication complication.

When you think "pharmacist," a hospital ward doesn't come immediately to mind. But did you know that Island Health employs 123 pharmacists, who help the interdisciplinary team care for patients in hospital, as well as long-term care and even the patients' homes? Island Health is celebrating our pharmacy staff during Pharmacy Awareness Month in March.

"We are very proud of the contributions our pharmacists and all the staff in our pharmacies make to support high-quality patient care," says Dr. Taj Baidwan, Island Health's Chief Medical Officer. "Our skilled pharmacy team here at Island Health is receiving national attention for research that will improve care even beyond our own region."

Jessica Power, a clinical pharmacist at Victoria General Hospital, won a [national award](#) from the Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists in February for her research on [integrating smartphones into hospital pharmacy practice](#). Her team found that using smartphones helped pharmacists answer drug information questions faster than other information sources, allowing improved communication with patients and other members of the health-care team.

"Using smartphones freed up pharmacists to spend more time with patients and their health-care team, which means better care for patients," says Dr. Sean Spina, clinical coordinator for pharmacy at Island Health.

The Island Health pharmacy team, made up of pharmacists, regulated pharmacy technicians, pharmacy assistants and support staff, plays an important role in supporting high-quality care. They work with patients and health-care providers to ensure medications are appropriate, safe and effective. Patients spend less time in hospital and are less likely to return with new complications when pharmacists play an active role in their care.

“I consult in the ICU, I consult on the medical wards - anything can come my way,” says Campbell River Hospital pharmacist George Nickoloff. “As pharmacists we may be stepping in where some sort of troubleshooting flag has come up, or meeting with patients who are leaving [hospital] in 10 minutes and need to know about the medication they are taking home with them.”

To continue to find ways to improve patient care, Island Health pharmacists are currently undertaking a research project that tests better ways to get more thorough medication histories from patients when they arrive in the emergency department.

“One in eight patients comes through our front door in Emergency due to a medication event, but we often face challenges finding out all of the medications a patient has been taking at home,” said Island Health emergency department pharmacist Dr. Richard Wanbon. “If we don’t have an accurate medication history, then we may not know if a medication interaction or side-effect is the problem. If we have an accurate list of medications, the care team can decide on the best course of treatment and prevent any further medication incidents.”

Island Health pharmacists are of international calibre, published in internationally recognized journals. Dr. Reginald Smith, Island Health clinical pharmacy specialist, co-authored a study on the value of compression stockings for preventing dangerous complications from blood clots in the December 2013 issue of *Lancet*. Pharmacists Laura Johnson and Dr. Bree Zehm published a study with Island Health psychiatrist Dr. Richard Williams comparing different formulations of schizophrenia medications in *BMC Psychiatry* in May 2013.

“Being involved in research is really valuable so we can be constantly improving treatments for our patients,” said Island Health pharmacist Dr. Celia Culley. “The research projects our pharmacists are involved in often lead to collaboration with other health care providers and researchers from across the country. This expands our own local knowledge of the best treatment and prevention options for our own patients here in Island Health based on new research and learning what is being done in other parts of the country.”

During Pharmacy Awareness Month, and throughout the year, “The Pharmacist is In” - join pharmacy staff on March 4th and 6th between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. in the Royal Jubilee Hospital Patient Care Centre atrium to learn more about their role in Island Health.

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This Island Health FYI has been sent to media, MPs, MLAs, mayors, Island Health leaders, foundations and regional hospital district chairs on Vancouver Island.

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