



2015

WINNER

## PHARMACY INNOVATION

### CERTINA HO

Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada, Toronto, ON

## SAFETY ALERTS A WIN FOR PATIENTS, PHARMACISTS, GOVERNMENT

UNDER ONTARIO'S PHARMACEUTICAL OPINIONS PROGRAM (POP), pharmacists can bill the provincial drug plan for certain interventions while dispensing prescriptions. Yet, as with many new services under an expanded scope of practice, logistical challenges compromise pharmacists' ability to embrace this opportunity to better serve patients while also generating new revenue.

Enter the Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) Canada. A research team of 12 pharmacists, headed by Certina Ho, developed practical tools to help pharmacists effectively and efficiently respond to—and bill for—drug-drug interactions (DDIs) that could otherwise have led to hospitalizations. “From the moment [we began participating] we were able to use the knowledge gained to write more professional pharmaceutical opinions advising physician prescribers,” writes one of the participating pharmacy owners in his endorsement of ISMP's nomination.

Thirty-five community pharmacies were part of the study and pilot project, funded by the Canadian Foundation for Pharmacy and entitled “Safety Alerts as Drivers for the Pharmaceutical Opinions Program (POP).” ISMP Canada's main premise was that pharmacists are

uniquely positioned to prevent adverse drug events by intervening on DDIs, and that POP is an opportune platform to facilitate such interventions. Yet the lack of standardized documentation and workflow issues posed challenges.

First, however, ISMP needed to set the stage by raising general awareness of clinically significant DDIs. While drug information resources are already available, they can lead to “alert fatigue,” or desensitization of pharmacists due to an overload of alerts, many of which are not clinically significant. ISMP Canada targeted 13 DDIs that formed the basis of its Safety Alert handbook for all participating pharmacies. It also created evidence-based algorithms to help pharmacists quickly formulate recommendations for physicians.

Then, to help overcome barriers presented by POP, ISMP Canada developed standardized forms to document interventions with physicians, including a cover letter for faxes. Researchers also shared strategies and resources to better integrate POs into the daily workflow, after interviewing pharmacists who have successfully done so.

The 35 pharmacies submitted claims for 230 POs, of which 67 were related to DDIs highlighted in ISMP Canada's

Safety Alert handbook. The research team calculates that these 67 interventions alone averted more than \$73,000 in costs for Ontario's healthcare system. Meanwhile pharmacists billed \$15 for each opinion, or \$1,005 for the 67 in total—which adds up to a significant return on investment for the provincial drug plan.

Participating pharmacists also attest to the value of the program—and continue to use the tools after the study's completion. “I continue to be cognizant of the DDIs that have strong evidence that they increase hospitalizations, and I continue to try to address these DDIs with opinions to the prescribers,” writes one. Notes another: “The practicality [of ISMP Canada's Safety Alert] helps everyday pharmacists like myself become more confident in handling what otherwise would be difficult situations.”

“This is an excellent, well thought-out initiative that has practical applications. Utilizing the POP program is an excellent way to intervene with health-related recommendations,” adds one of the Commitment to Care judges.

—Karen Welds



“PHARMACY IS ALWAYS CHANGING AND ADVANCING, BUT PHARMACISTS ARE ALWAYS THERE FOR THEIR PATIENTS.”

L-R, Front row: Ambika Sharma, Sharon Liang; L-R, Back row: Lindsay Yoo, Marvin Ng, Jim Kong, Certina Ho, Sara Arjomandpour, Roger Cheng, Sylvia Hyland. Missing from photo: Amanda Chen, Atsushi Kawano and Brett Morphy

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