

Next phase of practice research will focus on policy implications



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The first research in pharmacy practice can probably be traced back to the 1960s and the work by Barker et al on medication errors in an American hospital.¹ Research on the impact of clinical pharmacy services really started in the 1970s and 1980s. The first formal acknowledgement by the profession of pharmacy practice research, in the form of a practice research session, occurred at a conference of the British Pharmaceutical Society Conference in 1977 — just 26 years ago.

In their review of pharmacy practice research in Canada (page 23, Community pharmacy practice research: A systematic review of the past 32 years), Hanan B. Sokar-Todd and Thomas Einarson show us that pharmacy practice research was being published in this country as early as 1971. Their exhaustive references will serve as an effective bibliography for many pharmacists and students.

Pharmacy practice research serves a number of important purposes for both the profession of pharmacy and for the health of the population. It is a way of documenting evidence of the value of pharmacists and adding to the knowledge base of the clinical and academic discipline of pharmacy. Pharmacy practice research also contributes to the development and improvement of pharmaceutical

services through the acquisition of new knowledge. This paper clearly shows that the need for this type of research has been understood and the challenge taken up by pharmacists in Canada — hence, the exponential growth in published practice research through the 1990s.

Research is needed on the impact of interventions

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Community pharmacy practice research: A systematic review of the past 32 years

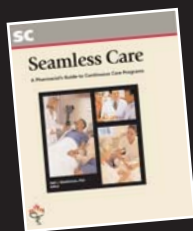
We note that research on the behaviour of a professional group (as reflected in Dr. Sokar-Todd's category "Pharmacists' attitudes, perceptions, willingness") tends to dominate when a profession is young in its research. (This pattern is seen in other professionals' groups, such as nurses.) Research on the impact of interventions by pharmacists is most needed to contribute to practice improvements and changes, and to contribute to policy changes at all levels. According to Dr. Sokar-Todd,

Canadian research of this nature was not published until 1992. Since that time 15 implementation/intervention studies have been published and we are aware, through a survey of pharmacy practice researchers in Canada,² that there are many more studies of this nature in progress.

Drs. Sokar-Todd and Einarson have focussed on the methods used for data collection. In order to have an impact on changing practice and policy, future research must be focussed on the gaps in our knowledge, and be sufficiently rigorous to merit deriving practice and policy implications from it. Meanwhile, their article is a valuable catalogue of pharmacy practice research in Canada. It points to the need to identify research gaps, both in content and methodology. By implication, it points to a need to review the impact of research to date on both practice and policy in Canada. ■

1. Barker KN, Kimbrough WW, Heller WM. *A study of medication errors in a hospital*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas; 1966.
2. Woodend AK, Dolovich L, Weir K for the Canadian Pharmacy Practice Research Group. (Abstract), The Development of an Up-To-Date Database Of Recent Canadian Pharmacy Practice Research Studies. *Can Pharm J* (2003) 136(6):50.

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