Mentors Making a Difference

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As a young pharmacist, I've always wondered what it would look like to be 20 years into my career and still enjoying every moment. It wasn't until I met Dr. Glen Brown that I saw this reality personified. He started at St. Paul's Hospital after his PharmD in 1987, back when proactive clinical pharmacy services were at its infancy. He started off in a department where clinical pharmacy services meant that there was a gentamicin pharmacist, theophylline pharmacist, and phenytoin pharmacist. From targeted therapeutic drug monitoring services to proactively covering most hospital wards with interdisciplinary teams, Glen pushed the envelope of what it means to be an indispensable (no pun intended) member of the health care team.

From being asked by physicians why the pharmacist was looking at their patient chart, to relying on the pharmacist to make independent judgements about optimal pharmacotherapy and dosing, Glen's impact on our scope of practice has expanded beyond what most would consider possible decades ago.

Of course, I didn't know any of this when I met Glen. He was simply my ICU preceptor on my PharmD rotation who I thought was a little too old school. I tried to politely reject his request for me to wear a lab coat and carry a binder on rounds, but quickly gave in because he was more persistent than most and I didn't have the stamina to insist - it was December 2011 and my 8th rotation in a row. I had already started off on a bad foot by mentioning to him that I never had an ICU rotation in residency. He probably thought he had his work cut out for him - an inexperienced, feisty girl from Alberta - that was probably the last thing he needed before his month-long December holiday. It didn't take long before I was humbled by what a patient teacher Glen was. Despite what is probably the hundredth time explaining the inner workings of various ICU machines and concepts, it felt like he was teaching me for the first time. Every afternoon, with a blank piece of paper, I had his undivided attention, where I would ask him all the ridiculously naive questions I had and he would draw or explain the concepts to me step by step. After each day, I would frantically try to re-write our discussions and make sense of his wobbly scribbles. On rounds, Glen was the steadfast anchor of the team. A man of few words during the lengthy teaching discussions, but whenever there was a question that the ICU staff could not even answer, they would turn to him. Before or after rounds, he would take care of the small details and less glamorous therapeutic interventions (IV to PO step down, electrolyte replacements, re-ordering auto-stop medications, and clarifying medication orders for nurses and residents). In his limited spare time, he systematically sifted through the table of contents of his targeted journals, read and shared relevant papers, wrote manuscripts, and conducted pharmacy practice research. Daily, people would stop in the office asking him for his advice on therapeutics, career, and life. He would sit back with his hands behind his head, look at them straight in the eye, and usually say something that was generally not something they wanted to hear, but something that always required a significant amount of self-introspection.

A short month with Glen taught me some invaluable lessons. Firstly, I learned what type of teacher I wanted to be - one that teaches concepts and approaches, rather than knowledge. Secondly, I learned what kind of pharmacist I wanted to be on the team - one that adds value to the team and is able to independently assess, manage and monitor drug therapy. Lastly, I learned what type of career I wanted to have in the long run - one that was filled with life-long learning, continued growth, and most importantly, the development of others. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a network of pharmacists who genuinely care to mentor and inspire the next generation. Glen's career met a career milestone of 30 years at St. Paul's Hospital last year. His generation has already made its sacrifices and contributions for us - are we ready to take the torch and mentor our future pharmacists?