

Editorial: New authority brings responsibility to listen

Written by Vicki Wood on September 1, 2013 for [Drugstore Canada](#)

The feature by Tara Maltman-Just on page 17 is quite different from the type of article we usually run.

Maybe a little too “Oprah?” That was my initial impression upon reading it for the first time, too; but, later, I found myself thinking about her message and realized just how true, simple and critical it really is.

In her article, Maltman-Just stresses the importance of thinking of each patient as a multifaceted person for whom their ailment, disease or condition is just one narrow part of their lives. She uses the metaphor of a person being like a forest, comprising many individual trees; if you focus on just one tree, you’re missing the rest of the forest.

It’s an appropriate caution, especially for health professionals known to be attracted to data, clinical statistics and numerical values. And it’s a message that grows increasingly important as pharmacists across the country begin to understand what it means to practise with expanded authorities.

For pharmacists in this new, almost primary care role, patient care now goes far beyond ensuring that the right patient gets the right drug in the right dose at the right time. The autonomy to adjust prescriptions (and in some cases, to prescribe), administer immunizations, extend prescriptions and manage serious chronic conditions brings with it enormous professional and personal responsibility. More responsibility than pharmacists in this country have ever had.

And based on what we’ve heard from many pharmacists, it’s not always easy to adjust to the new reality of being empowered with the task of making often important healthcare decisions for and with patients. It takes time, for one thing. Time to—as Maltman-Just advises—just listen.

So often, it’s only after lengthy, even seemingly off-topic conversations that the truly important piece of information—the one thing that explains everything—rises to the surface. It takes valuable time to ask the right questions, and to patiently listen to the answers.

Our cover story subjects, Anna and Bob Brown, Kim Borschowa and Jane Ling appear to have found ways to change their own practices so that patient interaction takes priority. Although each of these stellar pharmacists has found a unique patient care calling, they share a commitment to using all available and appropriate means to enable that crucial one-on-one time with patients.

Finding that time to ask the right questions, and, more important, to listen to what patients know about their own health, is never easy. But, increasingly, it’s not optional.
