

EDITORIAL

Standards of Practice for Clinical Pharmacists: The Time Has Come

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The lack of a standardized and reproducible practice by which clinical pharmacists optimize patients' medication-related outcomes has been an Achilles' heel for the clinical pharmacy discipline. Without a well-defined patient care process that is used by clinical pharmacists consistently and collaboratively across practice settings, other members of the health care team have remained uncertain, and perhaps even doubtful, of what to expect from clinical pharmacists and whether clinical pharmacists could reliably contribute to improved patient outcomes. Researchers seeking to study the impact of clinical pharmacists on patient outcomes have been hampered by the high degree of variability in clinical pharmacy practice, a situation that has yielded the impression that "if you've seen one clinical pharmacist practice, you've seen just that—one." Even experienced clinical pharmacists themselves have widely divergent opinions on the best approach for delivering patient care and the most fitting way to teach it to pharmacy students and residents.

The publication by the American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP) of *Standards of Practice for Clinical Pharmacists*¹ in this issue of *Pharmacotherapy* represents a major step toward addressing this issue. By setting forth a process

of care focused on comprehensive medication management,² ACCP articulates a practice that clinical pharmacists and their colleagues in other health professions can use as a basis for optimizing collaborative patient care. This is consistent with efforts currently under way to develop a standardized approach to collaborative clinical pharmacist practice in Europe.³ The *Standards* also delineates the components essential to the clinical pharmacist's documentation of the care process and patients' medication-related outcomes. If this approach is (1) applied consistently in team-based patient care settings, (2) taught to students, and (3) reinforced in postgraduate clinical training, the "if you've seen one, you've seen [just] one" observation will seldom be uttered in the future.

The *Standards* is an extension of ACCP papers addressing the definition of clinical pharmacy,⁴ clinical pharmacist competencies,⁵ professionalism,⁶ the desired qualifications of pharmacists who provide direct patient care,⁷ and the insightful report from the ACCP Professional and Public Relations Committee (published in this edition of the journal) advocating the adoption of a consistent process of care.⁸ Hence, in addition to establishing the clinical pharmacist's process of care and providing guidance for documenting that care, the *Standards* defines the broad foundation for the discipline: postgraduate training; board certification; mechanisms that confer authority, responsibility, and accountability for one's practice; expected steps to ensure

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professional development and maintenance of competence; professional and ethical standards; and the need for research and scholarship.

The *Standards* is a noteworthy publication for clinical pharmacy that has several important applications. First, it stands as a reference for educators, preceptors, and accreditors in designing and assessing clinical education and training. Second, for the benefit of other members of the health care team, it outlines the clinical pharmacist's professional capabilities and commitment to providing collaborative patient care. Similarly, nonpharmacy disciplines have published documents that effectively inform health professionals outside their field of the roles and responsibilities of their practitioners.⁹ Finally, the *Standards* can serve as an important resource for policy-makers involved in evaluating the role of clinical pharmacists in current and emerging health care delivery models.

Publication of the *Standards* marks an important milestone for clinical pharmacy. The time has come to codify the care provided by clinical pharmacists within collaborative team-based environments, thereby positioning them to more fully achieve their mission of optimizing patients' medication-related outcomes.

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