

We All Have a Story

Patrick Fitch

Although you will be reading it in the springtime, I am writing this message as the holiday season is just beginning to roll into high gear. The onslaught of advertising has reached a fever pitch, and it feels a bit overwhelming. But amid all this, stories of goodwill emerge. Rising against the ever-present background of bad news, such as plane crashes, war, terrorism, and—closer to our own profession—the fentanyl overdose crisis, are stories of goodness. It doesn't matter how you connect with the outside world—television, newspaper, social media—this time of year seems to unleash a torrent of feel-good stories. I don't know if the holidays bring out the best in people, or whether the media pay more attention to this type of story at this time of year, but for me, it's a welcome relief from the usual doom and gloom we hear about.

The common theme is that these are stories that need to be told. The telling of stories is how we connect with others, and thinking about them led me to reflect on how we connect with others in our workplace and in our pharmacy practices.

Storytelling is in fact an essential part of how we practise. When we do rounds, we often begin with the story of how each patient came to be under our care. Each patient has a unique story, and as health care professionals we play a huge part in shaping that story.

Storytelling shows itself in other forms as well. How many times have you been sitting with a group of coworkers, and someone says “I have this patient who...”? In most cases, we are telling the patient's story either to seek advice from colleagues or to relay some newly obtained piece of knowledge, and most of us learn and remember better through stories than through a dry recitation of facts.

Where I think we can do better is in using storytelling to celebrate our successes. Let's face it: health care is full of “bad

news” stories, in which patients die or experience bad outcomes or suffer from poor support systems that make overcoming chronic diseases a challenge. But there are lots of “good news” stories as well. We all know of patients who were close to dying and made an unexpected recovery, or patients who experienced a better-than-expected outcome because of our interactions with them. I think that as pharmacists, we typically don't take enough time to celebrate our successes, either as a profession or as members of a care team.

It's a little late for New Year's resolutions, but my request to all of you is to take a little time this year and do some storytelling with your colleagues. Let's get the word out about all the good work we have done as a profession and as dedicated health care practitioners. To help with that, the theme of the 43rd Annual CSHP Western Branches Banff Seminar (held March 17 to 19, 2017), was “Storytelling: Connecting Through Our Experiences”. The organizers put together an expert lineup of storytellers to inspire, challenge, and enlighten.

To paraphrase author Philip Pullman, “Stories are the thing we need most in the world.”



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