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A New Research Network Forms in New England to Bring Better Patient Outcomes

By Shefali Rao

It's a step towards collaboration in every possible way. The Massachusetts Pharmacists Association (MPhA) is teaming up with senior pharmacy faculty at Northeastern University and Pro-Cure Health Design (Pro-CureHD), a researcher development company, in addition to pharmacists, prescribers, university administrators, and other pharmacist associations in the New England states to bring a first-of-its-kind initiative to the region: its very own New England Pharmacy Practice-Based Research Network (NEP-PBRN).

The new collaboration will include everything from cross-disciplinary grant-submission partnerships, to grant-writing and manuscript training workshops for health practitioners, to research collaborations involving community pharmacists, prescribers, patients, and pharmacy researchers and educators all in an attempt to increase the different groups' connection and alliance. The goals? Enhanced pharmacist-prescriber-patient communication, reduced adverse medication events and inappropriate and unnecessary medications, improved medication adherence and efficacy, and powerful and effective research collaborations, all of which will lead to better health outcomes and a reduction in per-patient costs.

Behind it all

The new network, which will also build solid relationships with both aspiring and seasoned researchers from other healthcare disciplines, was founded by three passionate individuals who are dedicated to strengthening pharmacy research in the region. It was an idea brought to the group by Dr. Nathaniel Rickles, PharmD, Ph.D., an associate professor in the School of Pharmacy at Northeastern University, that sparked the conversation among the three – Dr. Rickles, David Johnson, Executive Vice President of the MPhA, and Peaches Udoma, COO and Principal of Pro-CureHD. She tells us that her company's interest in the project was the opportunity to help create a thriving network, which is one of the collaboration services the company offers in its Pro-CureConnections™ arm.

Dr. Rickles tells us, "Pharmacists can play a critical role in filling the gaps of primary health care in improving patient outcomes. But they often do not have the infrastructure and support to perform in what we could call those "enhanced" roles. Through research, we can show the value of commu-

nity pharmacists as instrumental members of the healthcare team, and how increasing their resources can help maximize their impact on patient care," he says.

Johnson feels that the NEP-PBRN will benefit pharmacists "who want to continue, in a sense, their academic careers... to be involved in research, to put together their ideas and put them to work," he says. It'll be equally beneficial, he adds, to other healthcare researchers who can then enlist the help of pharmacists. "Research is stifled because right now, it can be a chore to enlist pharmacies in a research project. Creating a network like this makes researchers take a good look at community pharmacy with an eye toward new sustainable business and health care delivery models."

Udoma adds, "We all have a commitment to empower pharmacy researchers and other health-based researchers who are not in the limelight a lot of the time. The ideas are there. The talent is there. The brilliance is there. But the community may not be. And community and collaboration are necessary to strengthen the individual researcher and to make his/her research vision a reality."

The value proposition

While there are a few other pharmacy practice-based research networks in the U.S., there are certain things that set this one apart from the others.

"The really big difference is the training piece," says Dr. Rickles. "Another is the sustainability of the research infrastructure. This will help leverage the intellectual property of the region. New England is rich with progressive medical thought leaders and we just haven't tapped into this connection yet," he says. The other networks, he highlights, do not necessarily build paths for future collaboration.

Spreading the word

Bringing the idea to conferences, submitting grants (the NEP-PBRN has already submitted two, since January), media exposure, offering training opportunities, and starting social media discussion groups is how the NEP-PBRN is spreading the word about the network. They're on a mission and it's one that they're extremely excited about. "I hope it results in innovation for community pharmacy through some high quality research. It's especially exciting for young pharmacy research-

ers," says Johnson.

In fact, the MPhA is rolling out grant and manuscript writing training programs for new and seasoned investigators from their headquarters in Woburn, MA, this June, in partnership with Pro-CureHD.

"What we find in pharmacy researchers is that many of them tend to work alone, like other researchers," says Udoma, "even though collaboration is the watchword of our age, when it comes to health-based research. And research just doesn't get done that way. At least good research doesn't. We know there's strength in numbers and that's why this community is so crucial. Researchers can often be stopped by thinking they don't have something important to give, but they do," says Udoma. "We can counter every single reason why they think they don't with a reason why they do."

For more information about the NEP-PBRN, contact David Johnson at djohnson@masspharmacists.org or Nate Rickles at n.rickles@neu.edu. Visit Pro-Cure Health Design at www.Pro-CureHD.com

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2015 Spring Conference

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