



## Pharmacy ambassador empowers patients

**Alicia Spence** exemplifies the new breed of pharmacist. In the three years since graduating from Dalhousie University's College of Pharmacy she has made it her mission to help improve patient outcomes. A community pharmacist at Cochrane's Pharmasave in Wolfville, N.S., Spence has teamed up with medical professionals and patients on a spectrum of health and wellness initiatives. In fact, her efforts in this regard have earned her top honours in Health Promotion in this year's Commitment to Care & Service Awards.

One of her main goals is to help people conquer their smoking addiction. Spence has seen the challenges some patients face in their smoking cessation struggles, and that many are unable to achieve their goal in a group setting. To boost their chances of kicking the habit, Spence has developed a one-on-one quit smoking program. Due to the program's record of success, she is now conducting stop smoking seminars around Atlantic Canada.

A firm believer in empowering people to take greater responsibility for maintaining their own good health, Spence hosts



a weekly lunch and learn event at her pharmacy to discuss numerous health issues such as headaches, nutrition, vitamin and herbal products. The word has spread, and a seniors group in a nearby rural community recently invited her to conduct a similar educational forum there on a monthly basis.

Currently Spence is partnering with a local nurse practitioner, doctor and dietitian to develop a research study to determine if intensive interaction with a community pharmacist can help reduce a patient's risk of heart attack or stroke. Her control groups include participants in her two lunch and learn sessions. Her hope is that the numbers will expand and become the basis of a cardiovascular health program that will provide every patient with an action plan designed to diminish their risk of cardiac disease. The educational component of the project includes one-hour presentations on determination of cardiovascular risk; stress management and exercise for risk reduction; healthy eating; smoking cessation and the role of second-hand smoke; blood pressure; blood

sugar; cholesterol; and putting it all together to reduce a patient's risk.

As a kind of ambassador for her pharmacy, Spence enjoys greeting new Acadia University students, and is working closely with student health services to find ways in which her community pharmacy can collaborate with them. She is participating in the Safety Net program now being piloted at 13 pharmacies across Nova Scotia. As well, she made presentations at the Tools For Life Conference, focusing on Pharmicare and Community Pharmacy and what the program offers to the community. Spence is planning a Lung Health Day in November, and that's in addition to working with a local physician and nurse practitioner on an e-Collaborative Challenge. She has also taken international normalized ratio (INR) training and is preparing to participate in the Nova Scotia Medication Review program.

Amazingly, on top of all this and in addition to a full dispensing schedule, she still has time to bake wedding cakes and take painting lessons.

—Jack Kohane

2008 Commitment to Care & Service awards

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