

Friend not Foe!

Developing the Partnership between the Director of Nursing and Consultant Pharmacist

Whether you're a new or experienced Director of Nursing (DON) or looking to apply for a DON position for the first time, one of the most beneficial relationships you'll have in the role is with the consultant pharmacist.

I have been in the role of a DON in several facilities and have worked with many consultant pharmacists. In each situation, I set out to make that consultant an important member of my team. Why? From my perspective, the consultant pharmacist is just as critical to the success of my facility as other team members. That's because I measure success in the quality of care provided to residents.

The Role of the Consultant Pharmacist

One of the leadership skills I learned early on was to surround myself with the best and most knowledgeable staff. It makes your job easier and, frankly, makes you look good! I see the consultant pharmacist as someone with a wealth of information. They are the go-to person for any questions related to pharmacy, medications, medication administration, and regulations involving these areas as well as a participant on many facility committees.

Likewise, the consultant pharmacists see their role as a resource to the facility who is available to keep you aware of issues and assist in working through areas you might find challenging to comply with. In addition, because they are responsible for several facilities, they get first-hand exposure to "best practices" that are working in other facilities and can share those to help you adapt systems that may need tweaking. They are also listeners at your meetings, learning about the processes and systems your facility is utilizing so they can assist in helping you implement new ideas that will benefit residents and your staff.

Critical F-Tag Support

There are many F Tags that fall under the regulation of 483.45 (Pharmacy Services) in the Rules of Participation. If you are new to the DON role, you might wonder who at your facility

is responsible for bringing the facility back into compliance if you receive a F-tag. While you might think that task belongs to the consultant pharmacist, it doesn't; it falls directly under your role and as the DON. However, the consultant pharmacist can support you in many ways. They can:

- Assist in helping to respond to the deficiency
- Help determine if an appeal process or challenge of the alleged violation, such as an IDR (informal dispute resolution) or IIDR (independent informal dispute resolution), should be implemented
- Intervene even during the survey and discuss the identified issue with the survey team

An essential responsibility of the consultant pharmacist is to alert a facility preemptively regarding concerns that could turn into non-compliance issues, and helping staff work through a process proactively to prevent that from occurring. For example, surveyors may "cross tag" deficiencies, meaning, they'll issue a couple of F Tags for the same situation. You might see this happening if you are using antibiotics outside of the standards of practice criteria; F Tag 881 for antibiotic stewardship might be cross tagged with F Tag 757 (free from unnecessary drugs). By working with the consultant pharmacist, you could reduce your risk of citations while improving your antibiotic stewardship program and also providing better care for the residents by eliminating unneeded medication.

Communication is Key

To maximize the value of your relationship, communication is essential between the DON and the consultant pharmacist. At the start, be sure to work together to set up what the expectations are such as:

- when the consultant pharmacist will be in the building doing monthly reviews
- how the DON should communicate new admissions and change in condition reviews

- the parameters for meeting participation, both in person and virtual
- how the consultant pharmacist will provide monthly reports and how you should respond
- how often you, the Infection Preventionist, and the consultant pharmacist will review the antibiogram reports

Some of the meetings that the consultant pharmacist might attend in addition to the QAPI and Infection Prevention and Control are resident at-risk meetings such as those around behaviors, falls, skin and weight issues. These can provide the consultant pharmacist insight into patient and system issues as well as tap into their knowledge regarding medications, therapeutic interchange, and cost containment. You'll benefit from their involvement by hearing about trends and patterns identified and practices that may need some revision.

A Foundation for Collaboration

As you can see, the consultant pharmacist is a valuable ally, or a "Friend not Foe." And developing this critical relationship is one of the DON's major responsibilities so that residents receive the best care. Be sure to remain dedicated to making the consultant pharmacist a team member – even though they're not an employee. While the consultant pharmacist has to meet the DON halfway, by making the consultant pharmacist feel welcome and needed, who wouldn't respond in kind?

So new or experienced DONs, it will be up to you to determine how best to work with your consultant pharmacist. I hope you take some of these suggestions to heart. You will be surprised at what a difference it will make if you have never experienced this kind of collaboration in the past. In my next article, we will dig deeper into the expectations for this relationship and how the DON and the consultant pharmacist can work together to meet them. Until then....