

Reducing pharmacy error

February 24 2015, by Misha Noble-Hearle



Credit: Danny Abriel

With 450 million prescriptions given out last year in Canadian pharmacies, mistakes will happen. James Barker and SafetyNET-Rx are helping reduce those mistakes.

"Statistics are not on their side," said Dr. Barker, a professor in Dalhousie's Faculty of Management and the principal investigator of the new research project for SafetyNET-Rx.

[SafetyNET-Rx](#) is a network designed to support open dialogue between

pharmacies, the government, patient safety advocates and university researchers. Its website offers a portal through which information can be shared and then disseminated to the pharmacists and the public. It also provides a safe area for pharmacists and the public to talk about their mistakes and learn from them.

Enabling dialogue

The partnership that forms SafetyNET-Rx began in 2008 after the Nova Scotia College of Pharmacists sought to develop a project to improve the safety in Nova Scotia pharmacies.

"It's an excellent partnership because it reflects what we're supposed to be doing as a major university," said Dr. Barker, who joined the project two years ago.

"The idea is that we are contributing to making the overall [health care](#) for Nova Scotians and Canadians better. That's what we're doing and that's what we were supposed to be doing."

Partners include representatives from Dalhousie, Saint Francis Xavier University, the University of Cincinnati, provincial pharmacists and the government as both funders and regulators of the project.

"It reflects the partnerships that are needed to make a positive change on something as big as health care," said Dr. Barker, "We're all trying to make pharmacy safety better in the province."

In addition to Dr. Barker, the SafetyNET-Rx team includes several other individuals with Dal connections: PhD alum Andrea Bishop, Pharmacy student Kellie Duggan and former faculty member Neil MacKinnon.

Tracking and reducing errors

Since 2008, SafetyNET-Rx has received over \$2 million in funding.

Dr. Barker's new project, which recently received funding from the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation, is to construct a database for errors that both pharmacists and the public would have access to. The site will analyze and share the mistakes with pharmacists with the goal of helping improve best practices.

He wants to see, "what is in the message that will catch a [pharmacist's](#) attention and move them to change." A large-scale survey will begin this summer to start refining and improving the error-reporting system.

Across Nova Scotia and beyond

All pharmacies in Nova Scotia have adopted the SafetyNET-Rx initiative, but the group is looking to expand across the country.

"All the provinces need sustainable health care systems, this is one of the many ways that we can contribute to that goal," said Dr. Barker. With the help of media attention from CBC, they are on their way, with a partnership already starting in Saskatchewan.

Dr. Barker, who is originally from the United States, says that this is his way of contributing to the province and the country that he now calls home.

"What drew me to this particular work was the ability to have an impact in the province," he said, "It's exciting for me to move into health safety because it is so important."

Provided by Dalhousie University

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