

## Center for Health-System Pharmacy Leadership: Open for Business

*On December 1, 2006, RAdm,(ret) Richard S. Walling became Director of the ASHP Foundation's new Center for Health-System Pharmacy Leadership. Discoveries spoke with Walling about his plans for the Center and what the next year will bring.*

***The Center is an endeavor that has been talked about within the Foundation, ASHP and its membership for some time now, so it is exciting to see it come to fruition. What attracted you to the Center and the challenge of launching it?***

The Foundation and ASHP are completely different environments from any I have worked in before, and that is one of the things that attracted me to the Center and the ASHP Foundation – I like new challenges. The other factor was that the leadership crisis has been talked about, both in ASHP and within pharmacy in general for some time now, and action is needed.

When I was the Chief Pharmacist Officer with the Public Health Service, leadership was certainly an area that was a frequent topic of discussion. In the corps, we incorporated leadership development as part of the officer's career progression. The corps had distinct aspects of position responsibilities for pharmacists to develop leadership skills. When I saw the announcement for the Director position, it struck me that I could take what I had learned in my career and help pharmacists that are linked to ASHP in their careers. I've been a member of ASHP for 20 years, so I know ASHP and the Foundation as quality and visionary organizations that are focused on both current and future professional leadership. Pharmacy and the practice environment are changing so fast that we have to look ahead. The Center can play a critical role in the future of pharmacy evolution.

Right now, people have great expectations for the Center. At the 2006 Midyear Clinical Meeting, the general feedback I heard was "fix it now!" But the fix will take some time, given the complexities in leadership and in the way the nation's health care systems are evolving. The Center has to look at what's happening now and try to help fill in the gaps that exist. But we must also challenge people's thinking about what's going to happen down the road, how the mix of health care professions might change, how technology might affect the skills needed to manage the pharmacy operation, and what kind of leadership is needed.

***What do you envision happening with the Center in this first year of operation?***

Fortunately, we are not starting from scratch. Prior to my coming on board, ASHP and ASHP Foundation leadership worked with Georgetown University Department of Health Systems Administration and MedStar Health. Their collaboration has given us a foundation upon which to build. Clearly, we have two immediate things to do: We have to establish the initial focus of our work, and we have to establish partnerships. Organizational focus and planning are key to ensuring we have the capacity to support programming that will be valuable to practitioners.

Partnership development is also critical. Leadership is a very "now" topic, and everyone seems to be interested in the subject. We need to explore which interested parties who are best suited for collaborative projects and how we might best partner with them.

We are very fortunate to already have one key partner: Amgen has committed significant resources to the development of a Pharmacy Leadership Academy, and so this will be the first programmatic thrust for the Center. The academy will be targeting current directors of pharmacy or people who are aspiring to those positions. We hope to have selected the first class by the end of this year.

***What else will the Center offer to pharmacists?***

The Center will begin by focusing on five areas: We want to assist and enhance the knowledge and skills of current and aspiring pharmacy directors. In talking with students and new clinical pharmacists, we have learned that leadership is a subject to which they have had limited exposure. We want to focus on new practitioners and developing leadership skills within this group. There are basic leadership skills that are important for all pharmacists, no matter what career path is followed.

We want to educate the executive leadership of health systems who may not recognize the pharmacy leadership crisis or don't know what to do to address it. Some health care systems, such as the Veterans Administration, do understand it and are addressing the problem. But some health care systems do not understand the potential crisis that is evolving. Those are people whom we want to influence.

There are also hospital or health-system pharmacies that are not affiliated with a system, such as those in rural areas and small hospitals that might be interested in leadership development opportunities. We want to talk to them and find innovative mechanisms to address their needs.

Down the road, we'll also be looking at whether there is a need to credential pharmacists who take these leadership roles and lead a pharmacy enterprise.

Lastly, we need to conduct a more in-depth review and analysis of leadership issues, as Sara White suggested in her paper (*Am J Health-Syst Pharm*, 2005; 62:845-55). This is the Center's role: to ask questions and gather information about the future needs for effective health-system pharmacy leadership and then to effectively address those needs. ✱