

As part of our ongoing support of Pharmacy, Pharmaceutical Partners of Canada Inc. is proud to bring you a special feature article on the intriguing insights of Kory Sloan, pharmacist at the high security, Edmonton Remand Centre.

Working with a captive audience



Kory Sloan definitely has a different kind of Pharmacy job.

On a wall near his office, here in the Edmonton Remand Centre, there's a glass display case, the kind you might find filled with sports ribbons and memorabilia. But this case contains trophies of a different type – homemade shivs and knives confiscated from prisoners, many fashioned from toothbrushes, spoons and hair brush handles.

“The inmates here are extremely creative,” says Kory. “I’ve even heard of guys trying to smuggle this kind of thing into the jail in their rectums, so they can settle a score with another inmate. I guess it’s true – where there’s a will there’s a way.”

No, don't let Kory Sloan tell you this is just another pharmacy job.

Kory's position is one-of-a-kind in Alberta, a Pharmacist working full time in a Provincial corrections facility. The Edmonton Remand Centre is a high security correctional facility, a sort of clearing house for people who have been arrested and are awaiting trial, and for those who have been tried and are awaiting sentencing. But the Centre also sees the worst of the worst, including sex offenders and Working with a captive audience murderers. It's an environment that Kory has gotten used to since his job began in 2007.

“This area of Pharmacy is really brand new, so basically my position was created when I started here,” he says. “The job of operating the Pharmacy

used to be done by the nurses, and they did an amazing job, but of course they're not trained in pharmacology, dispensing or inventory management. Purchasing and inventory management are a huge part of what I do here, and there's no way the nurses could do it all – not on top of their other responsibilities.”

Adding a Pharmacist to the staff at the Remand Centre has helped create far greater efficiencies. And, Kory adds, it's also led to some important cost savings.

“Many pharmacy-related functions simply couldn't be done by the nurses, so certain services and products had to be contracted out or purchased from an outside source. I think that when the government looked at that situation they realized it would be more efficient and cost-effective for a Pharmacist to provide these services on site. That's why I was hired, and it seems to be working well for everyone.”

Although Alberta allows all eligible Pharmacists a certain amount of prescriptive authority (they can extend existing therapies, adapt or adjust prescribed orders as necessary and provide medications in an emergency when there is no other prescriber) Kory says that having a pharmacist authorized to initiate new therapies would be a great help in this environment.

“There are times when no physician is available. Having another person on staff who can prescribe would reduce the workload for doctors, and the wait times for patients. Ultimately, it would improve the level of care, and I'm looking forward to the day when I have advanced prescriptive authority.”

Surprisingly, Kory views his job at the Remand Centre as being much like that of any other hospital pharmacist. But he does admit that working in a corrections facility offers a view of the world most pharmacists would never experience.

“We have several people here with HIV, alcohol-related issues, and a number of inmates on methadone maintenance. We also see some serious infections because of the high-risk lifestyle these individuals lead.”

“And downstairs in Admissions, where the inmates are processed, is a pretty intimidating place. It's our triage area, almost like a MASH unit, where we assess the healthcare needs of inmates as they come in. Offenders often arrive with serious injuries -- plenty of police dog bites, broken bones and bruises from car chases, you name it. To a large extent Admissions also functions as an Emergency ward. It can get crazy sometimes.”

While there are some obvious security differences between working in a hospital pharmacy and a jail, some security situations you'd never think of. For example, when an inmate goes down to the healthcare unit to receive a dose of methadone he's pat-searched when he arrives, closely watched for half an hour after the treatment, then pat-searched again before he goes back upstairs. Why? Kory's explanation would shock the average person.

“Inmates have attempted to conceal any kind of container, such as an empty toothpaste tube or even a rubber glove, then regurgitate and recover their methadone to be sold or bartered to another inmate. Methadone is a valuable commodity in here, and we need to ensure it's not abused. Also, you'll notice there are no IV stands or liquid hand sanitizers in any inmate areas. IV stands can be



used as weapons, and hand sanitizer contains alcohol. Inmates could potentially drink it or burn it.”

Does Kory ever worry about his personal safety?

“Security is the first consideration in a place like this, and the Corrections Officers do an incredible job of safeguarding not just the staff, but the inmates themselves. There’s a tremendous sense of teamwork -- we’re in an unusual situation, and we have to be able to count on each other. I’d say, for the most part, the inmates respect me and the other healthcare staff here. After all, they know we’re just trying to help them.”

Besides having a unique job, Kory Sloan also has a very special opportunity to influence the future of Pharmacy in the Corrections system in Canada. The Edmonton Remand Centre was built in the 1970s to house about 300 inmates, but the current population is nearly 3 times that high. That’s why the government is building a brand new state-of-the-art facility to replace the current one, and Kory has been given a significant role in designing the Pharmacy department at the new site.

“We’re planning a larger pharmacy facility with more personnel, a central automated drug distribution system, and as much technology as possible,” he says. “I’m hoping they’ll also add a technician to this practice so I’ll have more time to do clinical work. I think that proper disease management and pharmaceutical education for offenders would help lessen their dependence on services such as emergency departments once they’re back on the street. Right now it’s all just in the planning stages, but it’s very exciting to be in on the ground floor of a development like this.”

Kory reiterates that the future could hold tremendous potential for young hospital pharmacists in the Federal and Provincial Corrections area.

“It’s a great job, a brand new kind of practice in Canada, with all the rewards of Pharmacy plus the excitement of working in a unique and challenging environment. There’s a fantastic opportunity to break new ground here, establish policy, and influence the future of pharmacy in corrections. Frankly, nearly everything we do here breaks new ground.”

