



Original Research

# Pharmacist work stress and learning from quality related events

Todd A. Boyle, Ph.D.<sup>a,\*</sup>, Andrea Bishop, Ph.D.<sup>b</sup>,  
Bobbi Morrison, Ph.D.<sup>a</sup>, Andrea Murphy, Pharm.D.<sup>c</sup>,  
James Barker, Ph.D.<sup>d</sup>, Darren M. Ashcroft, Ph.D.<sup>e</sup>,  
Denham Phipps, Ph.D.<sup>e</sup>, Thomas Mahaffey, Ph.D.<sup>a</sup>,  
Neil J. MacKinnon, Ph.D.<sup>f</sup>

<sup>a</sup>St. Francis Xavier University, Gerald Schwartz School of Business, P.O. Box 5000, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada B2G 2W5

<sup>b</sup>Dalhousie University, School of Nursing, P.O. Box 15000, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3H 4R2

<sup>c</sup>Dalhousie University, College of Pharmacy, P.O. Box 15000, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3H 4R2

<sup>d</sup>Dalhousie University, Rowe School of Business, P.O. Box 15000, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3H 4R2

<sup>e</sup>The University of Manchester, Manchester Pharmacy School, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PT, UK

<sup>f</sup>University of Cincinnati, James L Winkle College of Pharmacy, 3225 Eden Avenue Cincinnati, OH, 45267, USA

## Abstract

**Background:** Among the many stresses faced by pharmacy staff, quality related event (QRE) learning can be among the most significant. In the absence of a supportive organizational culture, the potential for blaming individuals, versus identifying key process flaws, is significant and can be very intimidating to those involved in such discussions and may increase an already stressful work environment.

**Objective:** This research develops and tests a model of the relationship between the work stress faced by pharmacists and the extent of QRE learning in community pharmacies. Building upon recent research models that explore job characteristics and safety climate, the model proposes that work stress captured by the effort that the pharmacist invests into job performance, the extent to which the pharmacist is rewarded for such efforts, and the extent of pharmacist work-related commitment to their job, influence pharmacist assessment of the working conditions within their community pharmacy. It is further proposed that working conditions influence the extent of a blame culture and safety focus in the pharmacy, which, in turn, influences organizational learning from QREs.

**Methods:** This research formed part of a larger study focused on QRE reporting in community pharmacies. As part of the larger study, a total of 1035 questionnaires were mailed to community pharmacists, pharmacy managers, and pharmacy owners in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan during the fall of 2013 and winter and spring of 2014. Partial least squares (PLS) using SmartPLS was selected to test and further develop the proposed model. An examination of the statistical significance of latent variable paths, convergent validity, construct reliability, discriminant validity, and variance explained was used to assess the overall quality of the model.

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 902 867 5042; fax: +1 902 867 6142.

E-mail address: [tboyle@stfx.ca](mailto:tboyle@stfx.ca) (T.A. Boyle).

**Results:** Of the 1035 questionnaire sent, a total of 432 questionnaires were returned for an initial response rate of approximately 42%. However, for this research, only questionnaires from staff pharmacists were used thereby reducing the number of usable questionnaires to 265. The final model highlights that pharmacist work stress greatly influences perceptions of the working conditions in the pharmacy ( $R^2 = 0.52$ ), which, in turn, influence assessments of the safety focus ( $R^2 = 0.27$ ) and blame culture ( $R^2 = 0.14$ ) in the pharmacy. The model also found that the extent of a safety focus and blame culture within the pharmacy both influence the extent of organizational learning from QREs ( $R^2 = 0.44$ ) within the pharmacy.

**Conclusions:** In an environment where financial rewards are not always possible, ensuring that pharmacy staff feel respected and encouraged in providing safe care may help enhance QRE learning. Given the importance placed on organizational reporting of, and learning from, QREs in many jurisdictions in North America, the findings from this study suggest that a number of working conditions and perceptions of blame culture and organizational safety need to be explored before such processes can become entrenched in work flow.

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**Keywords:** Community pharmacy; Quality related events; Work stress; Partial least squares; Safety culture

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## Introduction

Pharmacy practice is faced with significant pressures from a wide variety of sources. Changes in work expectations and demands of pharmacists juxtaposed with various challenges in practice (e.g., time pressures, constant need for accuracy) have the potential to increase pharmacy staff work stress and the prevalence of quality related events (QREs).<sup>1,2</sup> Being involved with, and learning from, QREs, defined as medication errors that reach the patient and those that are intercepted by pharmacy staff before dispensing (i.e., near miss)<sup>3</sup> can create additional stress in the work environment and has been found to be among the most significant stresses faced by pharmacy staff.<sup>4</sup> Learning from QREs often requires pharmacy staff to carefully examine key activities that led to the QRE, some of which may include human error on the part of pharmacists, and discuss steps that should be undertaken to prevent similar error recurrence. Depending on the nature of the QRE and circumstances surrounding it, a range of changes in pharmacy structures and processes may be required. In the absence of a supportive organizational culture that enables learning with adequate policies and procedures in place, the potential for blaming individuals, versus identifying root causes (e.g., key process flaws), is significant and can be very intimidating to those involved.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in conjunction with work stress, organizational culture may be an important determinant of learning that occurs in response to QREs.

As pharmacy regulators from across North America increase their expectations with respect

to QRE reporting and learning in community pharmacies<sup>6</sup> there is a need to better understand how work stress impacts staff engagement in QRE discussions and assessments of safety culture in their work environment. Without QRE learning occurring within a broader culture of safety, errors may continue to happen, putting patients, pharmacy staff, and the license, reputation, and morale of community pharmacists at risk. Understanding the impact of work stress on QRE learning and pharmacists' assessments of safety culture can inform the development and implementation of interventions designed to target key stressors that may impact QRE learning. This research explores the influence of pharmacist work stress on the extent of QRE learning and the assessment of safety culture in community pharmacies. More specifically, building upon recent models<sup>7,8</sup> exploring the relationship between job characteristics and safety culture, this research develops a partial least squares model (PLS) of how the work stress faced by community pharmacists impact their assessments of working conditions, safety culture, and organizational learning from quality related events.

## Methods

### *Data collection*

This research is part of a larger study focused on QRE reporting and learning in community pharmacies. As part of the larger study, a total of 1035 questionnaires were mailed to community pharmacists, pharmacy managers, and pharmacy

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