Research in private hospital pharmacy

Hospital pharmacy research in Australia is dominated by that conducted in public hospitals. Evidence to support this is as close as the November 2009 Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) Federal Conference where of the 80 papers given and 216 posters presented, less than 5% came from private hospitals.

Why is there so little research conducted by private hospital pharmacists?

Could it be because of insufficient support is given to pharmacists by hospital or pharmacy managers to conduct research, or because private hospitals do not see medication-related research a priority, or for contracted pharmacists, is research increasingly seen as a discretionary spend and as such being abandoned in favour of more demanding areas of their businesses.

Despite the low profile of private hospital pharmacist presenters at the SHPA conferences, it would seem that there is a number of large private hospital pharmacies and private hospital pharmacy groups which are involved in practice-based research.

As examples there have been a number of research activities conducted by or involving private hospital pharmacies over the last year or so, including the following:

St John of God Hospital Subiaco:
Research (which has been presented) includes: the establishment of a new clinical pharmacist role in a day chemotherapy treatment unit; progress with medication reconciliation; trying to make the National Inpatient Medication Chart (NIMC) work in a private hospital environment; the establishment of a clinical pharmacist role in our Pre-Admission Clinic; development of a
clinical pharmacist role with the Hospital’s Acute Pain Service; review of parenteral nutrition guidelines with adoption of a larger percentage of standard pre-mixed formulations; and an ongoing review of exceptional drug funding by private health funds.

APHS
In addition to other research by its Professional Practice Unit and of particular interest and value to private hospitals is the APHS research into an Alternative model to the Intravenous Chemotherapy Supply Program (ICSP). This was developed after gathering and analysing both internal and industry-wide data to assess and validate an alternative ICSP, and with the support of the industry, has been presented to the Federal Government.

Uniting Care Health – The Wesley Hospital, Brisbane
Research has included: the Medication Safety Project, which explored the factors which impact on the occurrence of medication errors in order to reduce the number of errors and improve patient safety, and the Post Discharge Medication Review Program, which was aimed at using home-based medication reviews as a tool to reduce readmissions for patients newly diagnosed with chronic diseases.

Cabrini Health Victoria
The Pharmacy Department recently presented the findings of an investigation of the use of ward-based automated medication and supply management systems at the recent SHPA Conference in a poster entitled Make Pyxis work or Pyxis makes work?

There are two main challenges for those interested in research in medication management issues in private hospitals:

1. What can be done to increase the amount of research undertaken?
2. How can the results of this research be shared more widely?
In response to the first of these, there are resources available to ‘kick start’ research activity so long as there is the environment to nurture and encourage it. These include a raft of SHPA research grants, advice from colleagues in public hospital and universities and assistance to carry out the work from students, advisors and others.

In response to the second challenge, publishing or presenting the outcome of well structured research brings the reward of recognition to those most closely involved, but also the deferred benefits that come from an enhanced reputation as a place of research which attracts new graduates, retains the best experienced practitioners, and creates the platform for a truly innovative and efficient pharmacy service.

The comment by Roger Nation that any profession that is not actively involved in research is destined to become a dead profession, is worth noting.¹

References:
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First published in ‘Private Hospital’ (the official magazine of the Australian Private Hospitals Association), April 2010 edition