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# Exploratory Research in Clinical and Social Pharmacy

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## An awakening in the force—The birth of ERCSP



Many readers of this editorial will recall not so long ago when scholars in pharmacy practice and social pharmacy (PPSP) had very few options to which they might submit papers emanating from their scholarly work. This conundrum only seemed to worsen with notification that *Journal of Social and Administrative Pharmacy (JSAP)* had published its final issue back in 2003. However, the tide began to turn shortly thereafter, given the confluence of a number of events.

For one, PPSP was continuing a rapid evolution in reaching its scientific paradigm. Scientific paradigm is a concept perhaps initially discussed by Kuhn,<sup>1</sup> then expounded upon by Lodahl and Gordon,<sup>2</sup> by Biglan,<sup>3</sup> and then by many others since that time. Long associated with the basic, or “hard” sciences, paradigm is said to be attained or “achieved” when there is consensus among its principal scholars as to what is to be researched, the methods employed in conducting this research, and even the content of knowledge transferred to post-graduate and undergraduate students in the discipline. The implications of achieving or even evolving toward paradigm are momentous, and includes greater productivity among its constituent scholars.<sup>4</sup> Basic sciences are able to better control their environments and subjects of inquiry, versus those disciplines that are applied and/or deal with human behavior and attitudes. Such is the case with PPSP. PhDs in social pharmacy and post-graduate resident training and practice were extraordinarily rare even until the 1990s. However, with recognition that the biomedical model alone would not solve problems related to medication nonadherence, suboptimal therapeutic outcomes, economic constraints, and disproportionately unfavorable plights for vulnerable populations, forces in government, academia, industry, and philanthropy became more keenly interested in further propelling disciplines such as PPSP forward. This is witnessed through rising numbers of post-graduate degree programs, funding for research, and job opportunities for scholars and practitioners in academic, private, and government sectors.

Approximately 17 years ago, *Research in Social and Administrative Pharmacy (RSAP)* was born and cited as a vehicle for theory-based research in PPSP.<sup>5</sup> In its first full year of publication, RSAP received 75 submissions, whereas in 2020, it received well over 1200. Following RSAP's actuation, there have been a number of other new journals in PPSP, some with a more national or regional bent, but many others with an international scope and growingly multidisciplinary within the broad spectrum of subdisciplines comprising PPSP. The result has been an exponential increase in the total volume of papers being published by PPSP scholars, and arguably the productivity and stature of those scholars, as well as precipitous gains in the scientific paradigm of the discipline, as a whole.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the current digital age is making possible the

actuation of more journals, the efficiency and speed in which they operate, the expedience of communication between collaborators even across transcontinental borders, and the ease (mechanistically) of peer review.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, professional organizations have seen the value of PPSP scientific contributions to the entire profession and have bolstered their own journals as well as created foundations to administer competitive funding to worthy PPSP projects. Indeed, while arguably to have maintained the status quo for many years, pharmacy has seen noteworthy gains recently in stature and breadth of practice, seeing scope of practice grow for pharmacists and for pharmacy support personnel.<sup>8,9</sup> As such, one could argue that the growth in pharmacy practice creates more opportunities to document this growth in peer-reviewed publications, while the growth of reputable literature in pharmacy practice helps transform the profession. As such, it's a positive “chicken and egg” discussion as to which might precede the other.

Still, there remain momentous challenges in the medication use process worldwide, and with the continued spike in submissions to RSAP and other PPSP journals, it has become clear that there is a need for an even greater number of outlets for publication of noteworthy findings. This awakening in the force that is social pharmacy has been years in the making. RSAP has had to turn away an increasing number of provocative and potentially weighty papers each and every year. Having to “draw a line in the sand” from which to make publication decisions, that journal is adhering to its mission of publishing theory-based research. Thus, *Exploratory Research in Clinical and Social Pharmacy (ERCSP)* is born and aspires to become part of this positively disruptive force in PPSP. ERCSP will accommodate research papers in an evolving discipline that REQUIRES descriptive research such as perceptions of the utility of technology by pharmacy staff; explanations of how quality management principles can inform job redesign in pharmacy operations; patterns of medicines usage such as opioids and other drugs with disadvantageous adverse effect profiles using national databases or registries; and descriptions of patients' attitudes and behaviors such as medicine-taking, medicines disposal, sick role behaviors, propensity to use complementary medicine, and many others. ERCSP will have an emphasis on studies undertaken among vulnerable populations and those conducted in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). This includes, for example, how they might handle various issues, such as pandemics and medicines supply chain integrity; initial pilot projects to advance patient care that might be scalable, with lessons learned for other countries; and how changes in regulatory policy might affect population health and well-being.

ERCSP will enjoy a direct transfer agreement with RSAP, making it easy for editors and for authors to transfer a paper from one to the other in

seeking a better fit. Journal fit is the key, here, as there is no intention of ERCSP becoming “RSAP-lite”. The same rigor and expectations for study design and manuscript writing quality that RSAP has espoused<sup>10,11</sup> will also be the expectation with ERCSP. Together with our contributing authors, reviewers, readers, and financial sponsors of PPSP projects, ERCSP plans to contribute toward this continued awakening in the force. We look forward to engaging further with PPSP scholars!

#### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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