

Drug information service keeps pharmacists in touch

To better prepare pharmacists in providing information on medications and drug therapy, Oregon State University's School of Pharmacy organized a Drug Information Service in 1970.

It's still growing. "In addition to the benefits for pharmacy seniors, DIS is a significant question-answering resource for physicians, pharmacists and other health professionals involved in the management of patients," says Prof. Freya Hermann, service director.

"No one person can hope to remember all the important information about the many drugs and new developments in our field," she noted.

Use of the service at first was largely local—mid Willamette Valley pharmacists for the most part.

As a means of expanding the program in 1974, the School of Pharmacy submitted a request for funding from the National Institutes of Health. A three-year grant of \$112,171 was received and a toll-free, long-distance phone line added to

encourage statewide use of the service.

"Within the first year, the number of calls climbed from about 60 a month to 200," Prof. Hermann observed. "Calls come now from every corner of Oregon and from all types of health professionals. The number of physicians contacting us has particularly increased."

Nurses, physical therapists and other staff members from hospitals, health centers and nursing homes also are service users.

Questions cover a wide range of subjects including toxicity of drugs and commercial products, availability of drugs, foreign drug identification, dosages, adverse effects, drug interactions and storage.

"Great care is taken to be sure that answers are accurate and understandable," Mrs. Hermann emphasized. To this end, the material assembled by the students is always reviewed by a faculty member.

"The answers are given by phone or mail usually within 1 to 24 hours, depending on the

nature of the request," says Mrs. Herman. Her assistant is Lee A. Wanke, drug information specialist.

Not just content to respond to requests, the Drug Information Service began publishing an every-other-month newsletter in January 1975 that is designed to keep health professionals "ahead of questions." It also provides an opportunity for DIS to demonstrate the potential usefulness of the service for health professionals.

The newsletter is mailed to 3,500 Oregon physicians, 1,500

pharmacists, to nurses in Oregon's health care institutions and to information centers in other states. About 7,000 copies are distributed in all.

In the publication, Editors Hermann and Wanke present briefs on new drugs, items on pharmaceutical progress and procedures, and a "request review" section that presents answers to some of the questions that have been asked of the Drug Information Service.

One newsletter, for example,

covered these questions:

What is the current recommendation on the use of low-dose heparin for post-operative thrombosis prevention? Is clotrimazole effective in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis? What is the bacterial endocarditis prophylaxis program recommended for rheumatic and congenital heart disease patients about to undergo dental procedures?

Many pharmacists have questions these days too about the new state law that permits substitution of a less expensive

product in cases where a therapeutically equivalent product is available.

DIS operates on a 40-hour week now. A recording system is used to accept questions after hours and on weekends. Mrs. Hermann hopes the service can be further expanded in the future for evening-emergency help, particularly on poisons.

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