
PROFILES OF EXCELLENCE

A Better Life Through Education

Melvin H. Weinswig

*To love what you do and feel
that it matters—how could any-
thing be more fun?*

—Katherine Graham

I grew up in a neighborhood that would probably be referred to in today's sociology books as multiethnic and multicultural. We had all of the elements of a cosmopolitan, urban mix. Books and movies relate my youth, but I was there and although some describe it negatively, I loved it. It was home. Most of the older people had come from Russia, Poland, Ireland, Italy, and Greece. Others had come north from the Deep South. All came to Lynn, Massachusetts, because it was a mill and

This series will provide the reader with personal information and a career road map of those individuals recognized for their skills as teachers. The intent is that this perspective will help us understand how others achieved their successes and allow us to expand our pool of role models.

As pharmacy has increasingly embraced the concept of lifelong learning, it has been a challenge to find the role models who knew how to do it—and do it well. All too often, continuing education, as lifelong learning used to be called, was seen as peripheral to the teaching mission of the school or college of pharmacy. Continuing education was frequently viewed as an income stream for the provider or a way to stay in touch with the alumni. Few thought of continuing education as an essential part of the educational mission of the profession.

Herein lies the selection of Melvin H. Weinswig as the second in the Profiles of Excellence series. Professor Weinswig was one of the pioneers in the move from looking at continuing education as a sideline to seeing it as a core competency for the profession. He was instrumental in exploring new tools such as the audio teleconferencing format. He also expanded the reach of programs to meet the needs of pharmaceutical scientists working in the industry through the annual Land-of-Lakes Conference. His professional success can be measured in the programs at Butler and Wisconsin. But even more than that, his success in the programs can be seen in the positive learning links that have been fostered between practitioners and educators for the benefit of patients.

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shoe town and offered many factory opportunities for piecework. They came with a common goal. Each had to assure a better life for sons and daughters, many of whom would be first-generation Americans.

I often think of the courage of my grandparents, who crossed the ocean when they were in their early teens. They were alone and poor. They met, raised families, and taught my parents the same values that had helped them to succeed. My mother and father learned their lessons well. They grew together with the strong belief that there was only one direc-

tion for their two sons. The route to any success was an education which mandated college and a professional career. My parents worked and saved for that outcome. So many of the things we all take for granted were sacrificed to reach that goal. Nobody complained—or so I would like to recall. No work was too menial or too difficult if it provided an honest route toward the main goal. My father worked all day as the manager of a shoe store. At night he carried a full-time second job, supposedly to help the “war effort,” but it was also to inflate the nest egg to get us to college. My mother went to work for the same reason while still maintaining her primary role of full-time homemaker. She became the motivator and force that kept us all going strong as a family.

Since work seemed to consume so much of our family time, I got to spend private hours with my dad as I delivered Sunday papers on a regular route. He became my able assistant. I knew that any tips I would earn

would be carefully sorted by my mother so I could bring the money to school on savings day to buy defense stamps, which could eventually lead to a huge \$18.75 savings bond. I was working to do my part for America and also saving for my future education.

This all seemed so far away, yet it was a foregone conclusion that it would happen. I never dreamed about becoming a policeman or fireman like other kids. I did dream of becoming a baseball player. If only I had been taller, thinner, and more skilled, I really thought the Red Sox would be fighting for me to become the catcher to stand tall with Ted Williams. Dreams! Instead, I faced reality and became a soda jerk at the age of 13 in the local “drugstore.” This was a great job. It provided all the ice cream I could eat and also fulfilled my teenage goals. By working in the store, I would be able to finally drive a car, if only for deliveries. We never owned a car in my family, so the incentive of having a license and “wheels” kept me dishing ice cream, making sodas, and creating sundaes.

While doing these chores, I began to feel differently about my involvement. Somewhere along the way I had to begin to fill out college applications. Should I become an accountant? My math teachers felt that I could succeed in that profession. My parents—and my coach—had long before determined that a baseball contract would not be forthcoming. I decided that an accounting future was a reasonable consideration, but I wanted to work with people and not numbers. Suddenly the “drugstore” became a “pharmacy” and I realized the potential for human services within this career. I saw the pharmacist as counselor, a confidante, a trusted friend, a listener, and a healer. The pharmacist was not a person who only dispensed medicine. This person was a significant community contributor who played a major role in helping others live comfortably and successfully while facing many crises. I felt a sense of enlightenment regarding my future.

At the age of 16, I entered my first year at Massachusetts College of Pharmacy (MCP). For 4 years, I commuted between my home in Lynn and Boston, an approximately 30-minute drive, along with 4 other Lynn residents who were also attending MCP. Two of the carpool commuters were graduate students working toward their doctorates and serving as teaching assistants. This exposure to the graduate students opened the door to another possible career choice for me. My grades were good, and I was approached to stay on at MCP to enter the master’s degree program in pharmaceutical chemistry. Graduating pharmacy school at the age of 20 in Massachusetts prevented me from taking the state board exam. One had to be 21 to take the exam at that time, so I decided to

continue my studies. I worked part-time at the pharmacy while awaiting my twenty-first birthday so I could be a licensed pharmacist. I worked during the school year and full-time in the summer at the same local drugstore. I graduated from soda jerk to filling prescriptions in the back room, talking with physicians, and practicing “pharmaceutical care” with our patients long before that term was in vogue. I thoroughly enjoyed community pharmacy practice and the day-to-day rapport that the “druggist” had with patients and the community. Upon completion of the master’s degree in pharmaceutical chemistry, I had difficulty deciding whether to pursue a doctor of philosophy degree or to return to the community practice setting. My brother had followed his dream and had become the youngest school principal in Lynn while pursuing his doctorate in education. Upon completion of his degree he joined the University of Hartford as a professor.

Never having left Massachusetts, I decided to “go West” and accepted a teaching assistantship at the University of Illinois College of Pharmacy in Chicago. This college, along with the schools of medicine, dentistry, and nursing, was located at the medical center. Chicago seemed to be a much larger city than Boston, and living and working on the medical center campus was an exciting challenge in every way. Urban renewal surrounded the campus, which resembled a war zone, and the renewal led to the demise of the many ethnic neighborhoods that had created a unique flavor to that area. The course work was intense and challenging, and I discovered that I enjoyed the teaching tremendously. I realized that I could still effect and enjoy the profession without working daily in a pharmacy. Life on campus was not all work and no play, especially at the coeducational dormitory where I lived. I met a senior pharmacy student there, and we married in 1960. She was, and continues to be, my favorite pharmacist, and with her employment in community pharmacy, I am reminded constantly of what pharmacy is all about. I completed my degree in 1961 in medicinal chemistry and accepted my first real teaching position as an assistant professor at Butler University School of Pharmacy in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Teaching at Butler University was a new challenge with definite rewards. As a first-year professor, I had to prepare my lecture notes on a daily basis, trying to keep a day ahead of the students. Classes were small and provided the perfect opportunity to know every student in the class and to assist them beyond just lecturing to them. In 1964, I received a university-wide outstanding teacher award. I am extremely proud of this honor because the choice was made by the students. My mentor and good friend at Butler was Dale Doerr, who later became the

Dean of Pharmacy. Dale was a kind, hardworking, dedicated professional who also served many years as the Executive Director of Phi Delta Chi Professional Fraternity. It was Dale who encouraged me to get involved in the fraternity. In 1970, I became the National President of Phi Delta Chi. This provided me with the opportunity to visit schools of pharmacy around the country and to make lifelong friendships with other professionals. This exposure to educators heightened my respect for dedicated faculty at schools of pharmacy.

One of my committee assignments while at Butler was to chair the continuing education committee. I would usually participate in continuing education conferences, lecturing on a current topic. I found the prospect of continuing education to be more exciting and gratifying. The audience consisted of pharmacists and other health professionals who came voluntarily to learn and grow. They demanded current information presented in a meaningful manner. This was before the advent of mandatory continuing education, and practitioners were more selective in their attendance. Past students who returned to campus for these programs and stayed in touch with me throughout the years proved to be one of the most gratifying aspects of teaching. The positive outcomes of these efforts reinforced the fact that I had made the right choice when I decided on an academic life. Opportunities in business and industry were as plentiful as they are today and they are certainly more lucrative, but for my life's fulfillment, academe was right for me.

My productivity at Butler flourished as the Weinswig family increased in size with the births of our three children in three and a half years. This kept both myself and my wife, Pat, very busy and very tired. On the national scene in the middle 1960's, drug abuse was becoming a growing concern in the schools. Since I had been involved in science fair programs in the state, I was asked by many of the public schools to make presentations to the teachers and students on drug education. It became apparent that there was a tremendous lack of knowledge and misinformation about drugs in the schools and what was needed was a course for educators on drug abuse education. Smith Kline & French (as it was known before all the mergers) was approached to sponsor a summer institute at Butler for teachers in the Midwest. The course was quite successful and became a prototype for similar courses throughout the United States. I published a book on drug abuse education for educators that was widely used at the time, and this was followed by a second book that was used in the U.S. and translated into Spanish for the South American market.

I found myself quite busy participating in many programs throughout the U.S. and trying to get public schools to incorporate the education into their curricula rather than having guest lecturers. If we could educate educators, they would be available at the local level to disseminate the information directly to the students and parents for continuous support. This was the same approach that I chose in planning continuing education programs for pharmacists so they could maintain their competencies for the good of all their patients.

I was invited by Bill Blockstein to give a talk at the University of Wisconsin School of Pharmacy, where a search was being conducted for a new chair of continuing education in pharmacy. Bill, who was then chair, was moving into a new position as chair of the health science division of continuing education and was familiar with what we had been doing at Butler. I told Bill that although I enjoyed continuing education, I was a medicinal chemist and was quite happy at Butler. Upon visiting the campus, I was immediately captivated by the beauty of the university's lakeside location and the City of Madison. The continuing education department in pharmacy was impressive, with three faculty members responsible for the continuing education of all the sectors of pharmacy including industry, community, and academe, and this became a much more interesting prospect. One week later, I received a call from Bill offering me the position at the University of Wisconsin as Professor and Chair of Extension Services in Pharmacy. This prospect required much soul-searching in our family. I had taught at Butler for eight enjoyable years, but an opportunity to join a Big Ten university with a full professorship at the age of 34 was difficult to refuse.

We packed up our household goods and our three children (the oldest being six and ready to start first grade) and began the journey to Wisconsin, filled with the excitement and anticipation of starting a new career. The chemistry, which I promised myself I would continue, became less and less of a priority as I immersed myself full-time as Chairman of Extension Services in Pharmacy.

As I began to focus more on the role of continuing education for the profession, I realized that pharmaceutical education has as its basis the communication of existing knowledge and techniques and indoctrination in the methods of problem solving for use by the pharmacist once in actual practice. Continuing education (CE) must go a step further in ensuring the continuity of flow of scientific and professional information while at the same time recognizing that practitioners are extremely busy and value what little free time they have. In the earlier days of pharmaceutical CE, the major responsibility of providers was reinforcing, up-

dating, or expanding the practitioners' expertise. More recently, we have come to experience information and technology explosions that have changed the way we practice as well as what the consumer expects of the pharmacist and pharmaceutical services. Pharmaceutical CE is now generally considered a systematic method of education aimed at increasing professional worth and practice betterment. The assessment of what the needs of the practitioners are and how they have used the education is a gratifying experience.

The University of Wisconsin School of Pharmacy approved a graduate program for CE in pharmacy. This allowed me the opportunity to have a number of graduate students working toward the doctor of philosophy degree. The research for their dissertations covered all aspects of CE—from home study to live programming—and evaluating the results proved quite educational and stimulating. Our programming evolved into in-depth institutes covering patient-centered disease states rather than product-oriented programs. The response of the pharmacists was extremely positive since it was the knowledge that they would use in their daily practice. The concept of the pharmacy has moved beyond acquisition, storage, and dispensing to embrace both the patient and interprofessional consultation.

It has long been held that “keeping up” in one’s profession provides a means to maintaining competency by imparting new knowledge and skill, correcting educational deficiencies, stimulating intellectual curiosity, and providing reassurance to the public. “Keeping up” for pharmacists is possible not only through organized continuing education but also through self-study. Self-study is a major component of a lifelong learning process. The adage, “Experience is the best teacher,” describes self-study perfectly. Through experience, a person learns what he or she needs to learn next and will proceed to find the best educational experience to meet these needs. Yet it is possible to make learning more purposeful in a self-study mode. It is still frustrating to receive a call from a practitioner who needs hours and wants to know when the next course is given without caring what the topic may be. Those calls, fortunately, are less frequent and fewer in number, which is an indication of the elevation of the profession, which in turn, benefits the patient.

Continuing education builds properly on prior education and learning. From among the variety of resources available to pharmacists, a program of CE or self-study is possible. The challenge of keeping up can be met by CE in systematic sessions for group participation; by self-study; or by a combination that suits the educational, professional, and personal needs of pharmacists no matter where they practice. Tech-

nology has allowed one to interact with peers through the Internet and to keep current with new treatments almost instantaneously. Extension Services in Pharmacy has always been recognized as a leader in distance education. Well before computers, innovative convenient delivery of current and new pharmaceutical information was taking place at the University of Wisconsin. I received the distinguished service award at the University of Wisconsin in 1974 for some of these efforts. Today, ESP continues to be in the forefront, using the Internet, web-based education, and CD-ROMs. The value of live programming cannot be replaced, but time and labor shortages make technology a viable alternative in the pursuit of lifelong learning.

My three children have all graduated from the University of Wisconsin, but none chose the profession of pharmacy. Fortunately, all three are happy and involved in their communities. Two are married, and they have given us four grandchildren who are just as enjoyable as our own were but without the stress of parenthood. As they grew up, it was a pleasure to be involved in their activities by coaching basketball, baseball, and soccer and to set an example for them by being involved in our community. My wife and I have both served separate terms as president of our Temple. I have also been involved as president of the local swim club and vice president of the YMCA, and I have supported my wife in all of her numerous community activities.

After 25 years as chairman of Extension Services in Pharmacy and advisor to many excellent graduated students, I accepted the challenge of becoming Dean of the University of Wisconsin School of Pharmacy. The past five years have been stimulating and challenging and have created many opportunities to visit with alumni and friends of the university.

One of the major challenges facing me as I began my tenure as dean was to have the school and the university approve an all-Pharm.D. program with a budget that would support this creative curriculum. This goal was accomplished, and the first all-Pharm.D. class will graduate in 2001. The second major challenge was to invigorate a capital campaign for a new building. This required a great deal of time, energy, and travel for raising the needed funds. A building was projected to house the new curriculum and the growing research needs of the school. The State of Wisconsin had agreed to a \$45 million structure as long as the school would raise the first \$15 million. This was the ultimate challenge but also the ultimate reward because alumni and friends responded with contributions well over the \$15 million goal, much to the surprise of the state and the university. Similar efforts at other schools on our campus

have had difficulty raising the funds to reach anticipated goals. The new pharmacy school building, which is to be completed in November of 2000, is a marvelous educational and research facility that will allow Wisconsin to remain a leader in pharmacy education well into the twenty-first century.

Forty-five years ago, I graduated from the MCP, and although my career took a different path than originally planned, I have never regretted my choice of the pharmacy profession. Many of the dedicated professionals that I have met and worked with have become long-time friends. My favorite pharmacist, my wife of 40 years, continues to practice and reminds me of what pharmacy is all about. My parents, who are now deceased, had always wanted their sons to be “real” doctors but were, nevertheless, very proud to have their sons become professors dedicated to careers in education, fully loving what they do.

