

1 Pharmacy Managers: Be Proactive in Using Consultants William H. Puckett, M.S., M.B.A.,
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4 As a director of a pharmacy department, manager, or chief pharmacy officer, you are
5 periodically engaged with outside consultants for many varied projects. Sometimes the reason
6 is to provide help and expertise for a major new project or implementation. Sometimes the
7 reason is a top-down approach by health-system administration to validate department size
8 and expenses or, specifically, to reduce, cut, or downsize the department due to perceived
9 outside financial pressures. A phrase I heard once for this latter objective is to “shrink to
10 greatness.” Although this is very much tongue-in-cheek, frustrations can arise with these top-
11 down approaches to engaging consultants.

12 I have never understood why pharmacy managers tend to wait for consultant-need decisions to
13 be made by higher levels of management in the organization. Granted, sometimes the
14 pharmacy manager will be given an opportunity to assist in the selection of a consultant team,
15 but all too often the first knowledge that consultants have been engaged is an appointment
16 that appears on the calendar, or perhaps several people in suits show up at the pharmacy office
17 one morning.

18 So, do you need a consultant? Consultants can provide significant help, advice, and opinion for
19 the pharmacy manager. They can provide the expertise that is lacking, or difficult to have, in the
20 department. Many pharmacy managers simply do not have the time to research all the issues
21 requiring their attention. Consultants’ experiences, insight, and opinions are often unavailable
22 through internal mechanisms. But, should not the decision to engage a consultant team reside

23 with the manager who best knows the pharmacy's strengths and challenges? Why wait for
24 someone else to make this decision when you know best what is needed, who is needed, when,
25 and for how long? You also can better judge the qualifications and credibility of a potential
26 pharmacy consultant team than anyone else in the organization.

27 So, what is a pharmacy manager to do? Take charge, take the lead, act like the executive you
28 are, and identify the consultant resources you need and when to ensure that add-on projects,
29 implementations, assessments, and analyses are addressed effectively.

30 So, how does this affect the budget? You probably do not have a line item in your budget for
31 consultants, but can you tap into the administrative budget for funds? Most likely, health-
32 system administration has funds set aside for consultants, because they are used so universally
33 in business today. During the next budget cycle, decide if you want to pursue having consultant
34 funds in the pharmacy budget directly. Some institutions include consultant funds in a more
35 general patient care budget or in a corporate budget for sharing with other group members.

36 Why would my administrator support this? Administrators have a responsibility to the board to
37 ensure that a department head is managing their operation in a safe, legal, compliant, and
38 fiscally responsible manner. Rather than waiting for that administrator to engage consultants to
39 help in that assurance, the pharmacy manager should take the lead in ensuring that pharmacy
40 management and fiduciary activities are assessed and measured, and that they are sound.

41 Take the lead. The ASHP Consulting team is here to assist you in that effort.