

Diane B. Ginsburg



Serve Your “Every Patient”

Those of us who know Diane well might describe her as someone unfazed by the level of stress that would send some right to the cardiologist, easily juggling priorities that would cause many to crack, and doing so in this season’s premier designer shoes. When things start to feel manageable, Diane purposely goes in search of new challenges. As an example, she decided to pursue her doctorate degree at one of the busiest times of her life, a decision prompted by tragedy. Teaching is her passion, and she realized the degree would help her be a better professor and administrator. She finished her PhD coursework at the University of Texas at Austin with a perfect 4.0, of course.

Pharmacy was not in Diane’s original career plans, but serendipity played a significant role in her career path. As with other aspects of Diane’s life, once she decided to be a pharmacist she was all in, working almost full-time as a pharmacy intern while in pharmacy school.

Diane is currently Assistant Dean for Student Affairs and Clinical Professor of Health Outcomes and Pharmacy Practice at the University of Texas College of Pharmacy. She completed her bachelor of science degree in pharmacy at the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy, a master of science degree in hospital pharmacy at the University of Houston College of Pharmacy, and completed a two-year ASHP-accredited residency in hospital pharmacy administration at The Methodist Hospital in Houston, Texas. An active American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) member and volunteer, Diane is a past-president of ASHP and former chair of the board of the ASHP Research and Education Foundation.

Diane’s letter describes *the concept of “every patient” taught to her by her mother*, a philosophy that has made her a better pharmacist.



Dear Young Pharmacist,

I did not start out wanting to be a pharmacist. I graduated high school a year early and went away to college right after I turned 17. I thought I wanted to be a surgeon like my uncle, who was chief of surgery at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. I remember how he cared for his patients and talked to me about medicine. I was a good student in math, chemistry, and biology. Medicine was a good place for me. When I told my chemistry professor that I was pre-med, she suggested pharmacy school, as the curriculum was a great foundation for medical school. I remember telling the admissions committee that I had always wanted to be a pharmacist, that I had actually counted jellybeans with my mom's icing knife as preparation to fill prescriptions. I was lying through my teeth, as I had no idea what a pharmacist did. By some miracle, I was accepted. In 2005, I received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy. During my lecture to the students, I confessed and told them my story. My point in "coming clean" was that you never know where a path will lead you and to be open-minded. Had I not applied to pharmacy school, the wonderful opportunities that have come my way would have never been presented to me had I chosen a different direction.

In my first year in pharmacy school I learned the important lesson about "every patient" from my mother. My uncle had a very large surgical practice and needed someone to manage his office. He asked my mother, an accountant, to come and work for him. I watched how my uncle and mother cared for his patients. My mother would always tell me that every patient had a story; every patient was significant to someone. The patients were spouses, parents, grandparents, sisters and brothers, children, and friends. She would greet them with a smile, ask how they were doing, and listen to their answers. I was amazed how she did this with such sick people. What she told me stayed with me and guides my every decision:

Remember, every patient is someone significant. When you care for your patients, most of them will be perfect strangers. These patients deserve the very best we have to give them;

we should use all of our resources, our knowledge to help them. Someday, someone significant to you might need care and hopefully their practitioners will treat your someone significant as if they were family. Always remember the significance of “every patient.”

In my final year of pharmacy school, I received an application from The Methodist Hospital in Houston, Texas. I accepted my father's dare, sent the application in, and received an interview. After meeting the hospital staff, I decided to see if I could move someplace where I did not know anyone and make it. I packed up my little yellow Ford Fiesta named Woodstock and moved to Houston.

I had to see if I could take everything I had learned and do what I had set out to do. I was scared and excited simultaneously. I am amazed I had the insight at 22 years of age to be confident in myself, and my abilities. I would hear my mother's voice in my head, “no matter how crazy your day is and/or what challenges you may be having, remember who your patients are and that their issues are far greater than yours.”

The move to Houston truly changed the course of my life. During my first year of practice, I had the privilege to work with some amazing practitioners and mentors. The administrative team at Methodist and faculty at the University of Houston convinced me to enter their master of science in hospital pharmacy and joint residency program. I would be Methodist's first resident and the program would be submitted for the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists' (ASHP) accreditation following the completion of my two-year program. Had it not been for my graduate program, I would never have had the opportunity to teach and be exposed to academic pharmacy. The students I taught and supervised during rotations learned about my true north, my mother's concept of “every patient.”

I thought I would practice in hospitals throughout my career until I gave a few guest lectures at the University of Texas at Austin College of Pharmacy. After meeting with faculty and the Dean, something inside me said to give this aspect of practice a try. I voiced my concern to my mother about giving up my patient care role. She said that I would have one degree of separation from patients. My students would be providing care for “every patient.” She told me to trust my gut and heart, and I moved to Austin and started my life as an academic pharmacist.

In my new student orientations about professionalism, I made sure they understood about providing care for “every patient.” I never

thought that my words and teachings would come back to help me and my “every patient.”

My mother decided she was going to retire and moved to Austin to be near me. She flunked retirement and was hired by the City of Austin to work with their clinics. Unfortunately, the time she had in Austin was very brief. My mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. When we got the diagnosis, it was like an out-of-body experience. As a pharmacist when you hear this kind of diagnostic language, you immediately go into your clinical/problem-solving mode. Once that passes and you realize it is your family member, your reaction is completely different. Your clinical knowledge is your protection from the horrific events that are happening. As you can imagine, I was pretty distraught and tried to keep it together for my mother and my family. My mother’s tumors made it very difficult to manage her pain. One of my former students, a newly licensed pharmacist, said, “We figured out how to manage your mother’s pain, Diane. Don’t worry; she is going to get some relief. I am going to take care of her.”

I looked up at this young practitioner and asked, “Why are you being so kind to us?” He replied very simply, “All I am doing is what you told me to do that very first day of pharmacy school. Your mother is my ‘every patient.’” I remember thinking in that moment that it would never matter what I did for the remainder of my professional life. I got through to one student who took care of my “every patient.”

I have been fortunate to work with amazing people, serve the profession, and teach wonderful students. My compass is always with me—my mother’s teachings. I hope my story and experience help you as you begin this phase of your professional and personal journey. Make the most of every experience and give of yourself to your profession and community. Some of you will serve your profession in a leadership position. Step up and accept the opportunity. Never forget why you entered this revered profession; our calling is to serve our patients. Always remember your “every patient” and give the very best you can in your care. I wish you all the best and look forward to seeing the mark your generation will make on this profession.

Warmest personal regards,

Diane B. Ginsburg