

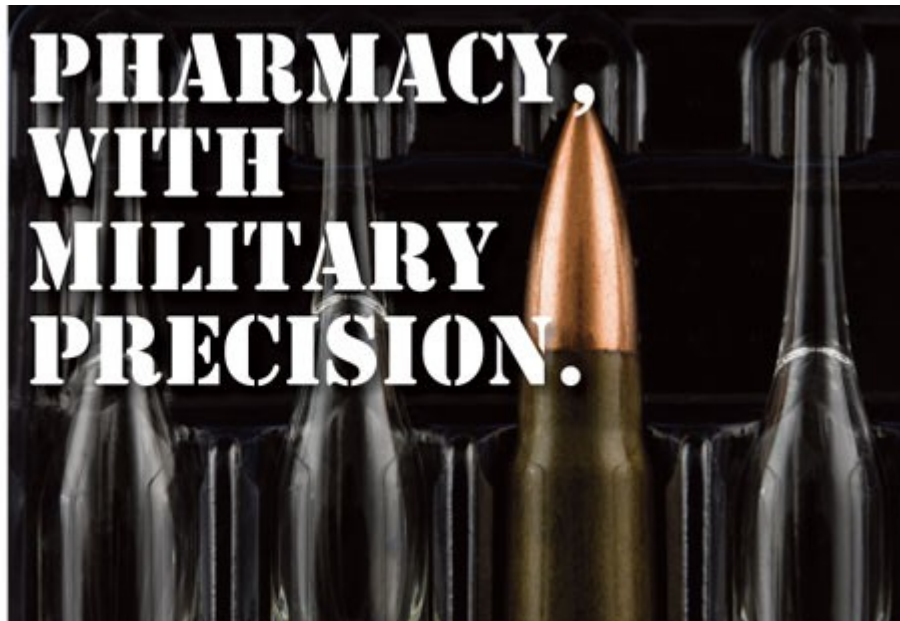
As part of our ongoing support of Pharmacy, Pharmaceutical Partners of Canada Inc. is proud to bring you a special feature interview with Major Douglas Doucette and Captain Sarah Van Heukelom.



Major Douglas Doucette



Captain Sarah Van Heukelom



Recently we had the opportunity — and the *privilege* — to speak with two members of the Canadian Armed Forces who are also practicing pharmacists. Major Douglas Doucette and Captain Sarah Van Heukelom took time out from their duties to tell us about the challenges and adventure of being a working pharmacist in today's Forces.

We spoke with Major Doucette first.

**M**ajor Douglas Doucette, CD, BSc(Pharm), PharmD, FCSHP was born and raised in Plaster Rock, New Brunswick. After completing three years towards a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Dalhousie University in Halifax, he was accepted into Dalhousie's College of Pharmacy, and then enrolled in the Canadian Forces' Regular Officer Training Program. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy in 1989 and was posted to Canadian Forces Hospital (CFH) Halifax as a staff pharmacist with the rank of Lieutenant.

In 2001, Major Doucette was promoted to the rank of Major and posted to Central Medical Equipment Depot (CMED) Petawawa as Deputy Commanding Officer, then, in 2002, as Commanding Officer. In June 2006 he retired from the Regular Force and transferred to the Health Services Primary Reserve, where he serves as a senior pharmacy officer and mentor of Regular Force junior military pharmacists. In September 2006, Major Doucette joined the Pharmacy Services of the Moncton Hospital as Pharmacy Clinical Coordinator and Clinical Pharmacy Specialist in Cardiology, and in 2009 he was appointed Regional Pharmacy Clinical Practice Manager for Pharmacy Services of Horizon Health Network in New Brunswick, which operates 12 hospitals and 31 clinics.

Throughout his military career Major Doucette has received numerous honours, including the Major-General J.W.B. Barr Award of Excellence in recognition of his exceptional contribution to the betterment of health services within the Canadian Forces.

**Q: Major Doucette, thank you for spending this time with us today. Please tell us a bit about yourself, and what led to your; interest in being a pharmacist in the military.**

My original goal was to become a surgeon, and although I eventually changed my mind, I still wanted to be involved in the health field. After my third year in biology I was accepted into the Dalhousie College of Pharmacy, and in 1985 I enrolled in the Canadian military.

Why the military? Growing up in Plaster Rock, I hadn't seen much of the world. The armed forces seemed like a great way to see Canada and other countries. I had recently married the daughter of an air force pilot from CFB Greenwood and we would occasionally take a military bus from Halifax to visit her parents. One day I went to talk with the Director of Pharmacy at CFH Halifax into the pharmacy and asked about working in the armed forces. He helped me get an interview with recruiters and I joined up soon after. What struck me was the variety of the life, and the chance to have new experiences. For me, the rest was history.

**Q: What special training did you need in order to become an active Pharmacy officer?**

You need to complete your pharmacy training at a civilian university, as I did at Dalhousie. You also have to do basic officer training, second language training, then specific training as a health officer, taking health administration courses etc.

**Q: What are some of the unique challenges you face as a pharmacist in the armed forces, as opposed to practicing in a hospital or community pharmacy?**

Well, in a traditional community or hospital-based practice you're seeing patients and providing meds, and that's the way it is on most military bases too. But one of the biggest differences is being moved from post to post. As a military pharmacist you can expect to be moving every few years, constantly getting acquainted with new people and new environments. This presents challenges in your personal and family life, but there are also a lot of good things about *hitting the reset button* every now and then: you make new ties, meet new team members, and gain a fresh outlook. Part of the reason the military moves people around is that new experiences can help you grow as a professional and literally move up in the ranks. I like that.



**On duty near Kandahar Air Field  
Afghanistan, 2005**

**Q: What are some of the unique rewards of practicing pharmacy in the armed forces?**

I enjoy working in a very broad scope of experiences. I've had the privilege of working in clinical, administrative and field settings. Even those non-clinical roles often required employing my clinical expertise. In the military I'm serving people who are serving their country, and that's how I *serve* my country.

**Q: You were deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1997, and Kandahar in 2005. What can you tell us about your duties and experiences during those deployments?**

In 1997, I was part of an advance surgical centre — think *field hospital*, like an American MASH unit. Fortunately, the conflict at that time had tamed down; it was then a NATO-led force which was able to bring peace and stop some of the atrocities. Our motto was "If the surgeons aren't busy, that's a good thing." My role as a pharmacist was to aid Canadian troops with day-to-day care in the camp's medical clinic and surgical hospital, and supervise re-supply of

meds, supplies and equipment to other Canadian medical stations. I also did some work with Red Cross, World Health Organization and Pharmaciens Sans Frontières (Pharmacists Without Borders) on distribution and disposal of pharmaceuticals.

I was in Kandahar for four weeks in 2005 where I helped to care for Canadian troops in the medical station, coordinated resupply of meds and equipment from Canada, and inspected pharmacy procedures at Canadian military outposts. I also provided surgical care to international troops and Afghani troops in a surgical hospital. Part of the job was going over inventories of supplies, and trying to cut down on duplication as Canada prepared to take over command of the surgical hospital from the Americans.

One of the experiences that will always stay with me was my first day in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1997 driving from Croatia into the Canadian camp — the combat zone. I could see the bullet holes, the pockmarks in the brick and the slate roofs. As we got close to the Canadian camp we began to see villages that were finally being rebuilt, thanks to the security provided by the Canadian troops. After only six months, the Canadian presence was making it possible for the rebuilding process to begin.

I was also involved in a humanitarian mission right here in Canada, at CFB Borden. The Canadian government had brought refugees to camps here from Kosovo so they would be safe until they could return home. Many of the children had inner ear infections from the pressure changes on the flight over, they were small and sick, but with our help the kids were healthy within a couple of weeks – running and playing soccer. There was one little boy who was so ill he was nearly sent to Sick Kids, but we were able to help him back to health. It was very rewarding.

### **Q: How has practicing pharmacy in the armed forces influenced your pharmacy practice in a hospital setting?**

I had a varied clinical practice in the military, including several postings to hospitals and a lot of community-type service, so I could hit the ground running when I went into civilian service. My armed forces leadership and management training — along with all the different roles and experiences I had — gave me a good leg up for my new responsibilities. At CMED (Central Medical Equipment Depot, Petawawa) I had 90 people under me, and it was very useful knowing how to handle people across a number of different sites.

### **Q: In 2006, you handed over command of CMED and transferred to the Health Services Primary Reserve. What role do the armed forces play in your life today?**

Not much day to day. As a member of the Reserves I'm required to train 14 days per year, take a fitness test and firearms training, and go to the range to keep up my basic military skills. I assist at educational events, do workshops, and share clinical knowledge with more junior military members. Basically I try to impart some of my experience and knowledge to younger officers.

### **Q: You were recently appointed Regional Pharmacy Clinical Practice Manager for Pharmacy Services of Horizon Health Network in New Brunswick. What can you tell us about that?**

Horizon Health is the largest health authority in Atlantic Canada and has 12 hospitals and 31 clinics. Working with the Regional Director and two other Regional Managers (for Pharmacy Operations and for Quality Improvement), I'm responsible for the clinical pharmacy services Horizon delivers. I'm responsible for research activities, education and professional development, development of clinical services, helping managers who supervise with pharmacists, and creating a summer internship program for student pharmacists.

## **Q: During your active career did you feel that the role of a Pharmacy officer had evolved?**

In some respects, yes. When I joined, there was a large military hospital in Ottawa and several others across the country offering traditional hospital services such as chemotherapy, cardiology, etc. But by the mid to late '90s they were pretty much all gone, as the government downsized the military. Today if a military member needs emergency care, he/she goes to the local civilian centre. At the same time, an enhanced focus on direct patient care and clinical services (pharmaceutical care) was being adopted by our profession. Military pharmacy also became a national leader in implementing unique initiatives such as prescriptive authority, a national drug formulary for the military, and practice-based research activities. The main role for pharmacists in the military now is on a base, often working with civilian (public service or contract) pharmacists. The practice can still be a little narrow, and you don't see the same numbers of really sick patients they would have seen in hospitals but there are still many opportunities to make a positive impact on patient care. The challenge for military pharmacists is to maintain their clinical expertise during times when they have limited patient care assignments or during operational deployments.

## **Q: What advice would you give to a pharmacy student or young pharmacist who may be interested in opportunities with the armed forces?**

The military is a very positive experience, and there are good opportunities available right now in the Forces. But when young people ask me about military life I don't sugar coat it. I make it clear that you could be moved every couple of years, and that can be challenging. Like anything else, you get out of it what you put in, but the military gave me many skills and advantages that have paid off in my professional life, and helped me be a better pharmacist. My advice is, do your research, ask a lot of questions, and if it doesn't turn out to be everything you thought it would be, either accept it or get out before you've put in too much time.

Serving in the Forces is a valuable and important job, and I'm immensely proud of my service. But it's not for everyone...



**Sightseeing in Banff, 2002**



Capt Van Heukelom holding a twin baby of a patients admitted to the 1 Canadian Field Hospital deployed to Haiti.

**“You’re a pharmacist, yes. But first of all you’re a soldier.”**

For Captain Sarah Van Heukelom, being an armed forces pharmacist means adventure and opportunity. But make no mistake, you’re in the army now...

**C**aptain Sarah Van Heukelom, 29, joined the armed forces in 2005. She was enrolled in the Regular Officer Training Program (ROTP), which means her Pharmacy education was funded by the Canadian Forces. Upon graduation in 2008, she went to work as a military pharmacist, and has never looked back. For Captain Sarah Van Heukelom, there’s no life like it.

**Q: We very much appreciate your time today Captain Van Heukelom. Can you talk about how you become interested in pharmacy as a career?**

I graduated from the University of Regina with a BA, and like many other young people I soon realized that my degree wasn’t going to take me in the direction I wanted in terms of a career. As I thought about expanding my education, I realized I was most interested in helping people. I liked the flexibility of Pharmacy, the chance to work in a variety of settings — including community pharmacy and hospital pharmacy — and the idea that I could make a difference in people’s lives. It’s a great career, with many opportunities.

**Q: And what attracted you to the armed forces, and practising pharmacy in that setting?**

Growing up, I was an Air Cadet, so I had some idea of what the military was like — the structure, wearing a uniform, that sort of thing. Through the Air Cadet program I obtained my glider license, and became a glider instructor. My military friends suggested I look at joining the Canadian Forces. It really appealed to me — the chance to go places, meet interesting people. It seemed like a great fit.

## Q: What special training did you need in order to become a Pharmacy Officer?

Of course you need a Pharmacy degree – I graduated from the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. You also need to pass your PEBC exam (Pharmacy Examination Board of Canada) and hold a pharmacy license in a province in Canada. I spent the summer breaks during university completing basic training in St-Jean Quebec. Then I did six weeks of health services basic field training at CFB Borden, learning military terminology so I could “speak the language”, essential when you’re dealing with the healthcare needs of soldiers. During this course you also go to the field to learn about both healthcare and military operations. You need an understanding of how to get supplies in and out of a theatre of operations, what type of injuries soldiers may sustain, and what each soldier’s role is so you can help them most effectively. You really need to understand the military as a whole, not just pharmacy — you’re a soldier first, then a pharmacist.

Military pharmacists are responsible for procuring medical equipment, so you need to understand the medical supply chain. In fact, this is one area that is quite different from the civilian pharmacy world.



Tear down of the 1 Canadian Field Hospital deployed in Haiti.

## Q: What are some of the unique challenges of practising pharmacy in the armed forces, as opposed to in a hospital or community pharmacy?

The most significant feature of life in the forces is that you have to be ready to deploy anywhere in the world, in conflict or in humanitarian operations, at a moment’s notice. When I was deployed to Haiti, I was on a plane within just a few days. You have to consider that when you sign up: if you don’t want to be sent away from home at the drop of a hat then perhaps the job is not for you. Frankly, I enjoy the excitement. I’m married, and my husband understands that I can be away quite a lot. Our relationship has grown to accommodate that fact of my life.

## Q: What are some of the unique rewards of practicing in the armed forces?

I like the fact that you can work in a variety of positions, get a feel for many different things, and decide what you like. New military pharmacy grads are sent on a six month preceptorship; I spent six months working as a clinical pharmacist in a civilian hospital. I worked in the base clinic pharmacy in CFB Petawawa, and then I was deployed to Haiti with the field hospital there. Now I’m in an administrative position that helps coordinate the medical requirements for operations. You can see there are many different experiences available, all over the globe. The military literally is a world of opportunity.

## Q: On a personal level, are there experiences you'll never forget?

Yes, my deployment to Haiti will stay with me forever. Going from a base clinic to a field hospital was very interesting. The DART team (Disaster Assistance Relief Team) was in Haiti to help the civilians, the field hospital was sent to augment the DART. The field hospital included services such as an ICU, a resuscitation bay, and an operating room. Plus the troops and other military personnel needed medical facilities, and so did the Canadian civilians.

The destruction from the earthquake was unimaginable. Buildings destroyed — literally pancaked one floor on top of another. The concrete they were made from crumbled in your hand. You could see how such poor building materials would result in that devastation.

The Haitians don't have a good healthcare system to begin with, and babies, for example, would come in covered in scabies. Luckily there was a specialist in the area who was working with babies.

I was in Haiti for 45 days, starting just a couple of weeks after the earthquake happened. It was gratifying to be able to help. When people saw the Canadian flag they felt a sense of peace, they felt good that the Canadians were there.

## Q: Describe your typical day as an armed forces pharmacist.

In peacetime, working on a base, the days are very structured, much like working in a community pharmacy. You work an 8-hour day and have weekends and holidays off. Some days I attend meetings with the healthcare team, and often there is time during the day to take specialty courses in languages etc. I am able to workout at the gym three times a week. There are other small tasks that must be performed a few times a year. For example, we attend the range to maintain marksmanship proficiency. Of course, that's life on a base. In a deployment situation it's very different — long hours and a steep learning curve.



The CDS, General Natynczyk stops for a picture with Pharmacy Officer Capt Sarah Van Heukelom.

**Q: Describe the process of applying as a pharmacist in the armed forces? Are they in demand?**

First you have to pass the aptitude test, a physical fitness test, a medical exam, and an interview. On top of this, the pharmacy requirements I talked about earlier must be met. If accepted into the ROTP program, the military will fund your pharmacy education, or if you are already a pharmacist you can join as a Direct Entry Officer. Usually, positions are available for pharmacists who want to commit to this lifestyle.

**Q: What advice would you give to a pharmacy student or young pharmacist who may be interested in the armed forces?**

I would say you really have to think about what you want from your career, about the opportunities the military has to offer, and whether or not these opportunities fit your vision of your career. Of course you need to realize that the potential exists to be deployed anywhere in the world and to be posted anywhere in Canada. If you're looking for adventure, to learn new things, meet interesting people and see the world, the military is definitely worth considering. Look at the possibilities and ask yourself "is that for me?"

**Q: What traits or characteristics would you say you need to become a successful armed forces pharmacist?**

You have to be flexible and open minded, with a sense of adventure. You need to want to see the world, and want to help people. There are humanitarian operations even during peace time.

I love my job, and I'd like to stay here my entire career. After the military I might consider going into hospital pharmacy, but for now, for me anyway, this is the place to be...

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