

VOLUME 15 | ISSUE 1 | OCTOBER 2025

# RHO<sup>Rx</sup>CHI *post*

St. John's University College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences



## THIS ISSUE'S FEATURED ARTICLE:

ANALYZING THE DATA:  
DOES ACETAMINOPHEN IN  
PREGNANCY CAUSE  
AUTISM?

RHO CHI TALKS: AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. SULAIMAN  
ALAM, PHARM.D, BCPS

THE RITE AID BANKRUPTCY: UNDERSTANDING THE  
ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY REPERCUSSIONS

6TH YEAR PERSPECTIVE: MEET THE PRESIDENT OF  
SCCP

THE FUTURE OF COMPOUNDING: NAVIGATING FDA  
AND STATE REGULATIONS

ANTIDEPRESSANTS AND METAPHYSICS: A  
PHILOSOPHICAL LENS ON EMOTIONAL BLUNTING

## About the Rho Chi Post

The Rho Chi Post was developed by the St. John's University Rho Chi Beta Delta Chapter in October 2011 as an electronic, student-operated newsletter publication with a team of three student editors and one Editor-in-Chief. Today, our newsletter boasts 12 volumes, over 90 published issues, and more than 600 unique articles to date with an editorial team of first to sixth year student pharmacists, as well as returning PharmD graduates.

The newsletter is distributed by St. John's University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences to more than 1,500 students and faculty members. Our monthly electronic mailing list continues to extend readership far beyond campus.

## Mission

The Rho Chi Post is an award-winning, electronic, student-operated, faculty-approved publication that aims to promote the pharmacy profession through creativity and effective communication. Our publication is a profound platform for integrating ideas, opinions, and innovations from students and faculty.

## Vision

The Rho Chi Post aims to become the most creative and informative student-operated newsletter within St. John's University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. Our newsletter continues to be known for its relatable and useful content. Our editorial team continues to be known for its excellence and professionalism. The Rho Chi Post sets the stage for the development of individual writing skills, collaborative team work, and leadership.

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# FROM THE EDITOR

## **A Message from the Editors-in-Chief, Nivaj Haque!**

I'm thrilled to share the first issue of the 15th volume of The Rho Chi Post. This edition features a rich blend of writing styles - from insightful interviews to clinically focused pieces - capturing pharmacy's constantly evolving landscape. Our team has worked tirelessly to curate content that informs, inspires, and encourages deeper curiosity. A big thank you to our Editorial Team, Executive Board, advisors, and readers for your dedication and support in bringing this issue to life. I hope you enjoy exploring these diverse perspectives and find ideas that enrich your journey in pharmacy this semester!

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Who can write for the Rho Chi Post Newsletter?**

Anyone can write for the Rho Chi Post! Our newsletter is not exclusive to St. John's University students. The Rho Chi Post accepts articles on a daily basis!

### **How do I submit an article?**

You can submit an article by creating an account on our website! Go to [www.rhochistj.org/RhoChiPost](http://www.rhochistj.org/RhoChiPost), click the login button from the upper menu bar, and click register. Upon making an account, you will be able to submit articles to our author inbox.

### **Who determines article topics?**

You are free to choose an article topic of your choice. Take a look at our Author Guidelines for ideas.

### **What happens after I upload my draft article on the Rho Chi Post website?**

Our Editor-In-Chief (EIC) will either edit the article directly or assign the article to a staff editor. If any revisions are needed, the editor will upload the article back to the portal, notifying the author via email. The author can then download the edited article, make the suggested revisions, and reupload the draft back to the portal. Additional drafts will be reevaluated by our copy editors and then EIC, repeating this process. Once no further revisions are needed, the article is accepted for publication.

### **Is there a deadline for authors to send revisions?**

There is no deadline to submit revisions for an article. However, the quicker revisions are made, the quicker the article can move through our editing process. Once an article is accepted for publication, it will be moved into a queue to be placed into an upcoming issue.

## An Interview with Dr. Sulaiman Alam, PharmD, BCPS

By: Aymon Choudhury, PharmD Candidate c/o 2027

Dr. Sulaiman Alam, PharmD, BCPS, is currently a Clinical Pharmacist in Emergency Medicine and Critical Care with NYU Langone Health. This interview aims to share Dr. Alam's personal experiences and insight into his pharmacy journey and career.

### Tell us about your current role at NYU Langone Health. What does a typical day-to-day look like for you?

In my current role as a clinical pharmacist at NYU Langone Health, I primarily staff the Emergency Department (ED) and various Intensive Care Units (ICUs). In the ED, I triage new medication orders, provide clinical support to providers and nursing staff, attend medical codes, and facilitate timely medication delivery and discharge reviews. In the ICUs, I perform similar functions but with a greater focus on complex patient cases, ensuring the appropriateness of pharmacotherapy. I am also actively involved in antimicrobial stewardship initiatives, including culture follow-up, therapy de-escalation, IV-to-PO conversions, and optimizing antimicrobial use.

### How is your work-life balance, and how has this career path influenced your life?

My current schedule aligns well with my family life and personal priorities. As a father of two, working evening shifts allows me to stay engaged in my children's daily routines while maintaining professional fulfillment. This career path has deepened my passion for pharmacy and lifelong learning. I take pride in staying current with evolving clinical guidelines and applying evidence-based practices, while also setting aside time to recharge and enjoy my personal interests outside of work.

### How was the personal and professional journey to get to where you are now?

My career began as a floater pharmacist in community pharmacy, where I worked for three years before moving into a managerial role. Although I valued the direct patient interactions in community practice, I sought a more clinically focused environment, which led me to NYU Langone Health. Over the past four years—three as a staff pharmacist and one as a clinical pharmacist—I've continued to grow professionally. I also earned my Board Certification in Pharmacotherapy (BCPS) through a nontraditional pathway, demonstrating my commitment to advancing my clinical expertise despite not completing a residency.

### What inspired you to pursue a clinical role within hospital pharmacy, particularly in emergency medicine?

My desire to continually challenge myself and expand my clinical impact inspired me to pursue a hospital-based role. Although clinical positions are often reserved for residency-trained pharmacists, I was fortunate to earn this opportunity through consistent dedication, initiative, and by cultivating trust among my colleagues and leadership. I'm passionate about emergency medicine because it demands quick thinking, adaptability, and teamwork—qualities I strive to strengthen with every shift.

## **What aspects of your PharmD education have proven most valuable in your current practice?**

Strong communication and professionalism have been invaluable in my current role. As pharmacists, we interact daily with patients, providers, nurses, insurers, and colleagues. My PharmD education emphasized effective communication, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary collaboration—all essential skills that enhance patient care and professional relationships.

## **What is one challenge you faced in your professional development, and how would you advise others to navigate similar obstacles?**

One major challenge has been managing time effectively across professional, academic, and personal commitments. My advice is to establish clear goals—both short- and long-term—stay organized, and leverage available resources. Whether it's institutional libraries, clinical databases, or mentorship networks, using your tools strategically can make a significant difference in achieving growth while maintaining balance.

## **What skills do you think are most essential for success in a hospital or clinical pharmacy setting?**

Adaptability and initiative are key. Each day presents new clinical challenges, and success depends on the ability to think critically and respond confidently. Continuous learning is equally important—when I encounter unfamiliar situations, I take proactive steps to master them so I can handle similar cases more effectively in the future. This mindset

fosters professional growth, strengthens problem-solving skills, and positions you as a dependable team member and mentor.

## The Rite Aid Bankruptcy: Understanding the Economic and Community Repercussions

By: Amanda Nakhul, Biomedical Sciences c/o 2027

Pharmacies such as CVS, Walgreens, and Rite Aid are known for being convenient, affordable, and accessible to most communities. Unfortunately, on May 5th, 2025, Rite Aid officially filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection for the second time in less than two years. As stated by the United States Courts, “A Chapter 11 debtor usually proposes a plan of reorganization to keep its business alive and pay creditors over time. People in business or individuals also can seek relief in Chapter 11”.<sup>1</sup> Since Rite Aid listed their assets and liabilities each in the range of \$1 billion to \$10 billion and confirmed its intention to sell nearly all of its assets, concerns have emerged about the influence of large corporations such as Amazon on traditional retail pharmacies.<sup>2</sup> If companies as large as Rite Aid are facing bankruptcy, it raises an important question: what does this mean for smaller businesses struggling to compete?

To regain stability, Rite Aid has pursued certain financial approaches to remain solvent. For instance, they are pursuing a “strategic and value-maximizing sale process” leveraging remaining inventory and adjusting prices to optimize returns. However, this process involves the sale of nearly all assets, including pharmacy records and real estate holdings. Additionally, the company has secured nearly \$2 billion in financing from existing lenders to bolster this process and sustain operations during the bankruptcy proceedings. Even CEO Matt Schroeder

expressed optimism about interest from both national and regional potential buyers, signaling some hope that portions of the business could survive under new ownership.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these efforts, optimism proved insufficient. Rite Aid has embarked on a massive shutdown of its retail footprint. Since emerging from its first bankruptcy in 2023, where it closed around 500 stores, the chain now faces a nearly complete wind-down. To minimize patient disruption, prescription files and pharmacy services are being transferred to other chains. CVS Pharmacy plans to acquire 625 Rite Aid prescription files and 64 entire stores, primarily in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. Other chains including Walgreens, Albertsons, Kroger, and Giant Eagle are also part of the transition plan to absorb patients and maintain continuity of care.<sup>3</sup>

In Philadelphia, the impact has been particularly severe. All 33 remaining Rite Aid stores in the city are set to close, as well as dozens more across the Delaware Valley. Over 595 corporate office workers at the Navy Yard headquarters have been laid off, with layoffs projected to reach 1,100 Pennsylvania employees by the end of the summer.<sup>4</sup> These closures not only affect customers but also disrupt healthcare students and professionals who relied on Rite Aid as a major source of hands-on community pharmacy training.

# THE RITE AID BANKRUPTCY

The closures of Rite Aid locations have carried significant emotional and social weight across communities. Once a trusted neighborhood pharmacy, Rite Aid provided not only medications and health consultations but also everyday essentials that fostered convenience and connection. In its final days, widespread markdowns drew loyal customers for one last visit, turning familiar aisles of prescriptions and wellness products into rows of empty shelves and clearance signs. The sight of these shuttered pharmacies- once integral to patient care and community well-being- has come to represent the broader decline of local pharmacy access and the fading sense of trust that many communities once associated with their neighborhood drugstore.

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## 6TH YEAR PERSPECTIVE

### 6th Year Perspective: Meet the President of SCCP

By: Rebecca Sabzanov, PharmD Candidate c/o 2026

Reian Daniels is a sixth-year PharmD Candidate c/o 2026 at St. John's University, College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. During her time at St. John's, Reian has served as the President-Elect and currently serves as the President of the Student College of Clinical Pharmacy (SCCP).

#### **What is SCCP's mission statement and goals for this year? What sets SCCP apart from other pharmacy organizations at SJU?**

SCCP is the student chapter of American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP). Our mission is to help familiarize students with the field of clinical pharmacy and help them become a stronger residency candidate. SCCP's goals this year center on increasing engagement, improving communication, and creating more meaningful learning opportunities for our members. We're focusing on strengthening our social media presence through interactive posts that reflect what students actually want to see, maintaining consistent collaboration among executive board members, and introducing new event formats that make clinical pharmacy more approachable and engaging.

What sets SCCP apart from other pharmacy organizations at St. John's is our emphasis on clinical exposure and real-world connection. Our events are designed to help students explore different specialties, gain insight from practicing pharmacists, and develop the confidence to apply clinical thinking early on in their careers.

#### **What are some of your favorite events that SCCP hosted, and how have these events uniquely benefitted pharmacy students?**

Some of my favorite SCCP events each year are our APPE Student Panel and Alumni Panel, both of which have become staples for our organization. These sessions connect students across different stages of their pharmacy journey and help them feel more prepared for what comes next. Our APPE Student Panel focuses on the student perspective by covering topics like rotation preparation, time management, communication with preceptors, and how to make the most of each site. Hearing directly from peers who have recently completed rotations gives younger students practical advice and reassurance before entering their sixth year. Last year, we also hosted a Medication Review at a senior living center near St. John's. It was a great opportunity for students to apply their counseling and therapeutic knowledge by explaining medication purposes, proper use, and common side effects. The experience gave participants a strong sense of what patient interaction looks like in practice, which was incredibly valuable before starting APPEs.

Finally, our Alumni Panel is always a highlight. We feature a mix of residents and fellows who are eager to share their experiences with the application process, interviews, and their day-to-day responsibilities. It provides an opportunity for students from P1-P4 to gain early exposure to the different postgraduate pathways available and a clearer picture of what those roles entail.

## 6TH YEAR PERSPECTIVE



### How did you get involved with SCCP?

It feels like a long time ago, but if I remember correctly, I joined SCCP in my fourth year as Fundraising Chair. I knew I wanted to get involved in a student organization, and SCCP had always stood out to me on campus. I was also looking for leadership experience, so it felt like a natural place to start with something I was genuinely interested in. At the time, I was planning to pursue a residency after graduation, and I believed SCCP would be the perfect environment to grow professionally while gaining meaningful experience. Looking back, I am so glad I made that decision.

### What is your role as President of this organization?

As a sixth-year student on APPE rotations, I am not as involved in many on-campus activities, and that's where my wonderful President-Elect really steps in. My main responsibility is to oversee our e-board positions and ensure we stay on track with timelines and goals. I also facilitate communication among board members, provide guidance when challenges arise, and make sure all events align with SCCP's mission. In addition, I represent the organization in meetings with faculty and help with strategic planning for the semester or year. Ultimately, our executive board has a lot of autonomy, but my role is to provide structure, mentorship, and support so they can successfully plan and execute meaningful events.

### How do you balance APPE rotations along with serving as President of SCCP?

Balancing APPE rotations while serving as SCCP President is definitely a challenge, but it is not much different than when I was President-Elect balancing and dealing with DnD's. Thankfully, I already figured out a system that works for me. I give all the credit to my Google Calendar for keeping me organized and on top of deadlines. Planning is key, so we try to schedule our events at least a month in advance to avoid last-minute emails or delays in getting approvals from the college. Having a strong executive board also makes a huge difference. When I set a task or deadline, I know they will follow through, which takes a lot of pressure off me. Clear communication is equally important. If I cannot take on a task, I coordinate with the President-Elect, who is always willing to fill the gap. Working closely with her ensures continuity and quality in all our initiatives. This role has strengthened my time management and communication skills, and it has shown me the value of trusting a capable team to get the job done.

### Any advice for students who are interested in getting more involved with pharmacy organizations?

My advice is to be open and join something that genuinely interests you. I know there can be a trend to join organizations just to pad your CV, but it is much more rewarding to be involved in something that aligns with your interests. Try to make the most out of the experience! By the time you reach your sixth year and start pursuing post-graduate opportunities, interviewers want to know more than just the title you held. They want to hear about meaningful experiences and what you actually contributed. Also, have fun with it. Being part of a student organization gives you a chance to be creative, suggest new ideas, and help shape events or initiatives. It is also a great way to make friends early in pharmacy school and build a supportive network.

My advice is simple: If you are interested, take the leap and join.

# ACETAMINOPHEN IN PREGNANCY



## Analyzing the Data: Does Acetaminophen In Pregnancy Cause Autism?

By: Amanda Kastel, PharmD Candidate c/o 2027

On September 22, 2025, President Donald Trump and HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. held a press conference that sparked widespread confusion among medical professionals and the public. Roughly three minutes into the briefing, President Trump announced that the FDA would notify physicians about a “very increased risk” of autism associated with acetaminophen use during pregnancy. He further urged expectant mothers not to take the medication due to this alleged risk. As current and future medical professionals, it is crucial to understand the actual evidence behind this claim – especially since it concerns the health of a particularly vulnerable population: pregnant patients.

### What the Data Says

To make their claim, RFK and his team cited a systematic review of 46 studies.<sup>1</sup> Of the 46 studies included, only 8 studied an association between acetaminophen and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). It is important to note that all studies included in the review were observational – either cohort or case control designs – which means causation cannot be established.

Moreover, the studies demonstrated significant heterogeneity in several key areas such as how acetaminophen exposure was defined, the timing of exposure during pregnancy, and the dose and duration of use.

Out of the 8 studies, 5 utilized self-reported maternal data<sup>2,3,4,5,6</sup> to define acetaminophen exposure, while others measured maternal cord blood<sup>7</sup>. Liew et al<sup>2</sup> used a retrospective recall method to collect data. In this study, 6-month postpartum mothers were asked whether they had used acetaminophen during pregnancy, when they took it, and how long they took it for. This is a weak method of data collection, as it depends entirely on maternal memory, opening the door for recall bias and potential exposure misclassification.

Ji, et al<sup>7</sup> determined acetaminophen exposure by measuring maternal cord blood for acetaminophen and its metabolites. While this approach eliminates recall bias, there are still significant concerns with this study design.

# ACETAMINOPHEN IN PREGNANCY

Being that the half-life of acetaminophen is only 2-3 hours long and the cord blood is measured at birth, this method only accounts for exposure very late in pregnancy and does not account for any acetaminophen exposure early in pregnancy (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> trimesters), a time much more crucial for fetal neurodevelopment.

These inconsistencies make it difficult to pool the data to draw a definitive, single conclusion. The authors of the systematic review acknowledge this substantial heterogeneity and therefore correctly choose not to perform a quantitative meta-analysis. While the decision makes sense, without a meta-analysis, the magnitude of association between acetaminophen use and autism cannot be quantified using statistics, resulting in a much weaker, more subjective conclusion.

## **A Sibling Control Analysis Refutes the Claim**

Numerous reliable studies have demonstrated that autism spectrum disorder has a genetic component attached to it.<sup>8,9</sup> Therefore, in a study attempting to establish an association between ASD and acetaminophen use, it is crucial to account for this genetic confounder to ensure legitimate, unbiased results.

In the systematic review cited by RFK Jr. and his team, the only study to control for genetics was a large-scale cohort study<sup>10</sup> conducted in Sweden between 1995-2019. This study examined over 2.4 million births to evaluate the risk of acetaminophen exposure during pregnancy and the development of various neurodevelopmental disorders including ASD, ADHD, and intellectual disability.

Acetaminophen exposure was determined through midwife interviews starting at 8-10 weeks gestation, supplemented by prescription data (2005 onward). The study accounted for numerous confounders, including genetics, using a sibling-controlled design. In the analysis where they did **not** account for sibling relationships, the results showed a small but statistically significant increase in the risk of autism with prenatal acetaminophen exposure (HR, 1.05 [95% CI, 1.02-1.08]; e-value, 1.28). However, once the genetic component was considered, the association was no longer observed (HR, 0.98 [95% CI, 0.93-1.04]), with similar results observed for ADHD and intellectual disability. These findings indicate that apparent associations between prenatal acetaminophen exposure and autism are likely attributable to genetic factors, rather than causal effects of the medication.

## **Clinical Implications**

Even before the September 22 press conference, it has always been clinical practice for expectant mothers to use any medication, including acetaminophen, only when necessary and at the lowest effective dose and shortest possible duration, due to the delicate biological state of pregnancy and risk-benefit considerations. Organizations such as the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and the World Health Organization (WHO), have emphasized this principle for decades.

During the press conference, President Trump stated there is “no downside” to not taking acetaminophen in pregnancy. However, prolonged or uncontrolled maternal fever can pose real risks to the fetus, including neural tube defects<sup>11</sup>, congenital heart defects<sup>12</sup>, and even neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism.<sup>13</sup>

# ACETAMINOPHEN IN PREGNANCY

The language used in the press conference may generate unnecessary fear in expectant mothers, potentially leading to serious damage as a result of avoiding acetaminophen when medically needed.

## Conclusion

Based on the evidence, the medical consensus regarding acetaminophen use in pregnancy remains unchanged. Acetaminophen continues to be considered the first-line, safest option for treating maternal pain and fever. As with all medications in pregnancy, expectant mothers should consult with their doctor or pharmacist to ensure the safety of both mother and baby.

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## The Future of Compounding: Navigating FDA and State Regulations

By: Armanda Dervishi, PharmD Candidate c/o 2027

Compounding has always been an important part of pharmacy practice. Patients often need medications that aren't available commercially – whether it's a dye-free suspension for a child, a topical cream, or hormone replacement therapy. However, in recent years, compounding has received more attention than ever before. In 2013, Congress enacted the Drug Quality and Security Act (DQSA), redefining federal oversight of compounding pharmacies in response to public safety concerns. Since then, both the FDA and state boards of pharmacy have worked to strengthen regulations but figuring out how to balance safety with patient access hasn't been easy.

### **FDA Oversight: 503A vs. 503B**

The DQSA created two main categories for compounding: 503A and 503B. Pharmacies that operate under 503A only prepare medications for individual patients when there is a prescription and remain under the oversight of state boards of pharmacy. On the other hand, 503B outsourcing facilities can produce larger batches for hospitals or clinics, but they must register with the FDA and adhere to stricter manufacturing standards, such as Current Good Manufacturing Practices (cGMP).<sup>1</sup> The FDA hoped this would provide a clearer system for oversight, but it also created some gray areas. Many small compounding pharmacies feel they are being held to the same standards as large manufacturers, which can be expensive and difficult to manage.

At the same time, others argue that stronger oversight is necessary to ensure sterility and protect patients.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Mix of State Rules**

While the FDA sets broad rules, states still play a huge role. Every state board of pharmacy imposes its own requirements for personnel training, documentation, and facility standards. Some have quickly adopted USP <795>, <797>, and <800>, while others are behind.<sup>2</sup> This inconsistency makes things complicated, especially for pharmacies that ship across state lines. A pharmacy might meet one state's requirements but fall short in another. It highlights why better collaboration between states and the FDA is needed – federal rules provide consistency, but local boards have the knowledge to enforce standards within their communities.<sup>3</sup>

### **Politics and Legal Battles**

Compounding has also become a political issue. The FDA has been criticized for overreaching when it comes to restricting compounded products. Hormone therapies, veterinary compounding, and office use medications have all been points of conflict between regulators, providers, and patient advocates.<sup>4</sup> Lawmakers are divided as well. Some support expanding FDA authority to protect public health, while others believe that too much regulation could limit access to therapies patients depend on. These debates reveal how challenging it is to strike the right balance between safety and accessibility.

# THE FUTURE OF COMPOUNDING

## Looking Ahead

The future of compounding will likely be shaped by a few key developments:

1. Stricter Standards - USP updates, including changes to beyond-use dates and hazardous drug handling, are expected to be adopted by more states.<sup>2</sup>
2. More FDA Enforcement - Hospitals and health systems are turning to FDA-registered outsourcing facilities for sterile injectables. This trend may continue, raising questions about whether more 503A pharmacies will need to transition into 503B status<sup>1</sup>
3. Advancing Technology - Cleanroom automation, environmental monitoring, and new equipment can help reduce contamination risks. While expensive, these tools may become necessary as expectations for safety rise.<sup>5</sup>

## Conclusion

Compounding is at a pivotal point. Pharmacists recognize the importance of personalized medicine, but stricter regulations and higher standards are transforming the practice. Both the FDA and state boards aim to protect patients, yet their overlapping authority often confuses pharmacies caught in the middle. As the profession advances, pharmacists will need to not only uphold evolving standards but also advocate for fair regulations that ensure customized medications remain safe and accessible to the patients who need them most.

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## Antidepressants and Metaphysics: A Philosophical Lens on Emotional Blunting

By: Archana Murugan, PharmD Candidate c/o 2029

Antidepressants are a class of medications commonly prescribed to help with an individual's mood or behavior, specifically targeting the serotonin levels in the body. Existentialism, transcendentalism, and deconstruction represent prominent movements in metaphysics and can be used to explain the effects of antidepressants on an individual's perception. Plato's Allegory of the Cave further illustrates these three philosophical movements, which can also be connected back to the effects of antidepressants. This raises an important question: how do antidepressants alter our perception of self and identity?

### Scientific Insight: Emotional Blunting and Serotonin

Scientists from the University of Cambridge in collaboration with the University of Copenhagen, sought to understand why half of common antidepressant users experience emotional "blunting." They conducted a study with 66 volunteers - 32 took escitalopram (a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor, or SSRI) while 34 received a placebo.<sup>1</sup> After analyzing the data, researchers "found that participants taking escitalopram were less likely to use the positive and negative feedback to guide their learning of the task compared with participants on placebo."<sup>1</sup> This suggests that escitalopram affects individuals' sensitivity to rewards and their ability to respond adaptively, thereby impairing reinforcement learning, a key process for environmental adaptation.

Emotional blunting and serotonin-related effects among antidepressant users can therefore be directly linked with the metaphysical studies of existentialism, transcendentalism, and deconstruction.

### Existentialism and the Search for Meaning

Existentialism is a philosophical framework that prioritizes the significance of individual existence and the quest for meaning. Referring to Allegory of the Cave, individuals are described as confined captives where their perception is restricted to just shadows, representing a constrained comprehension of reality. Escaping the cave signifies the profound existential quest for knowledge and authentic existence. When serotonin levels fluctuate, patients may experience side effects ranging from mild to severe. In some cases, patients experience "serotonin syndrome"-characterized by "altered mental status, autonomic dysfunction, and neuromuscular excitation" - which can significantly affect daily life.<sup>2</sup> Patients experiencing the psychological and physical side effects of antidepressants may experience internal and social conflicts, thus, it is crucial to navigate these challenges effectively so that individual's do not continue to "live in the shadows."

### Transcendentalism and the Realm Beyond

Transcendentalism asserts that reality surpasses mere empirical observation, extending into a higher, non-material realm - a concept reflective of Plato's "Realm of Forms" described in The Republic.<sup>3</sup> In the Allegory of the Cave, the freed prisoners encounter the outside world and realize that true reality extends beyond the shadows he once perceived.<sup>4</sup>

# ANTIDEPRESSANTS & METAPHYSICS

This journey represents the movement toward understanding eternal and unchanging truths.

In the context of antidepressant use, experiences such as emotional blunting, activation anxiety, or serotonin-related alterations may prompt a deeper connection with one's inner self and surroundings. These experiences can emphasize the importance of self-development and personal insight in overcoming emotional challenges. Through introspection and engagement with their environment, individuals can achieve balance- echoing the transcendentalist belief in the intrinsic goodness of people and nature.

## **Deconstruction and Neurochemical Understanding**

Deconstruction entails a critical examination of texts to reveal underlying meanings and contradictions. In the cave allegory, while some captives embrace enlightenment and freedom, others remain comfortable in their chains, accepting shadows as their truth.<sup>4</sup> The article "Understanding and Managing Antidepressant Side Effects" explores the frequency and consequences of side effects linked to antidepressant use - noting that despite advances in safety and tolerability, such effects remain a significant challenge. Kelly and co-authors reported that among 401 patients with depression, 86% experienced at least one side effect, and 55% experienced one or more bothersome effects.<sup>5</sup> Healthcare professionals seem to underestimate the prevalence of these side effects which include sexual dysfunction, gastrointestinal problems, weight gain, insomnia, and fatigue or somnolence.

Much like the prisoners who choose to remain in the cave, some patients persist with treatment despite discomfort, while others discontinue therapy in pursuit of perceived freedom from medication. In general, SSRIs and SNRIs can alter mood and emotional regulation, potentially leading to shifts in how individuals perceive themselves and interact with others. Although an individual doesn't necessarily choose to withdraw from reality, antidepressants can have the potential to affect one's personality without warning.

## **Conclusion**

Pharmacists, as medication experts and accessible healthcare professionals, play a crucial role in guiding patients through antidepressant therapy. Just as Plato's allegory of the cave encourages individuals to step beyond the shadows in search of light and understanding, pharmacists can help navigate the uncertainties of treatment by providing compassionate care and clear information. Given the diverse mechanisms and effects of antidepressants, collaborative communication between patients and healthcare providers is essential for achieving neurochemical stability and emotional well-being. Supporting patients throughout their journey results not only enhances the individual's overall well-being but also fosters a renewed sense of purpose and self-awareness.

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# MEET THE TEAM

## Meet the 2025-2026 Team Members



### Editorial Team & Production



**Nivaj Haque**  
**Editor-in-Chief**

The Rho Chi Post stands as a reflection of our community's dedication to learning, growth, and leadership in pharmacy. Each issue is a chance to not only highlight important developments in healthcare, but also to showcase the voices and perspectives of our students and faculty. By engaging in research, writing, and discussion, we strengthen the skills that will carry us beyond the classroom and into our future roles as professionals. I am honored to be a part of the Rho Chi Post's Editorial Team and look forward to serving as this year's Editor-in-Chief!

**Muskan Basra**  
**Managing Editor**

The Rho Chi Post holds a special place for me as it's a platform where students and faculty can collaborate to share their knowledge with the pharmacy community. It provides a unique opportunity to translate academic knowledge into practical, well-written content that benefits the broader healthcare community, all while building the critical communication skills needed to influence professional discourse and contribute to the evolution of pharmacy practice. I am honored to serve as this year's Managing Editor.



**Reyaz Mussaleen**  
**Content-Focused Copy Editor**

As an Editor for the Rho Chi Post, I see this role as an opportunity to further elevate the voices and perspectives within our profession. By drawing on my experiences in pharmacy, regulatory affairs, and medical communications, I aim to highlight the evolving impact pharmacists have on patient care and healthcare innovation. I am passionate about making complex scientific and policy topics accessible while sparking meaningful dialogue among students and professionals alike. Through this platform, I hope to encourage curiosity, showcase the breadth of our field, and contribute to advancing pharmacy's role in society.



# MEET THE TEAM



**Alba Dona**

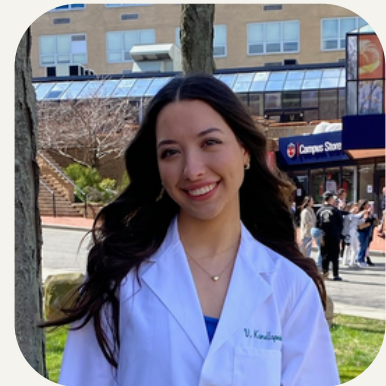
**Content-Focused Copy Editor**

Joining the Rho Chi Post offers me the opportunity to participate in meaningful discussions within the field of pharmacy, follow current events and news, and continue evolving my skills as a future pharmacist. I view the Rho Chi Post as a creative outlet that produces factual and intriguing content. I am excited to bring my voice to the newsletter this year as a Staff Writer and Content-Focused Copy Editor!

**Vicki Kanellopoulos**

**Content-Focused Copy Editor**

As a pharmacy student, I see strong communication as an essential part of our profession. In my role as a Content-Focused Copy Editor, I'm looking forward to helping ensure the Rho Chi Post delivers clear, accurate, and engaging content that reflects the voices and experiences of our community.



**Aymon Choudhury**

**Graphics-Focused Copy Editor**

Being a part of the Rho Chi Post means having the opportunity, as a student, to contribute to the pharmacy profession with creativity, professionalism, and meaningful communication. I am excited to help develop content that informs and inspires our community! I look forward to collaborating with a team and using my skills to support the Rho Chi mission.



**Amanda Kastel**

**Graphics-Focused Copy Editor**

In recent years, there has been growing distrust in the field of medicine, extending from the general public and even to political leadership. As a P3 pharmacy student, I feel a strong responsibility to counteract this widespread medical misinformation. Contributing to the Rho Chi Post- a team rooted in clinical knowledge and dedicated to unbiased research- is the ideal opportunity to support this mission.



# MEET THE TEAM



**Muskan Basra**  
**Senior Staff Editor**

The Rho Chi Post holds a special place for me as it's a platform where students and faculty can collaborate to share their knowledge with the pharmacy community. It provides a unique opportunity to translate academic knowledge into practical, well-written content that benefits the broader healthcare community, all while building the critical communication skills needed to influence professional discourse and contribute to the evolution of pharmacy practice.

**Sean Persane**  
**Senior Staff Editor**

Being part of Rho Chi Post is an honor and responsibility that reflects my dedication for and growth in the field of pharmacy. It's a chance to grow alongside like-minded peers, to lead with integrity, and to give back through knowledge and collaboration to the public. Being a member reminds me to always push myself to do better, to stay curious, and to use what I've learned to help others in meaningful ways.



**Kharissa Seepersaud**  
**Staff Editor**

Being part of the Rho Chi Post is an exciting opportunity to collaborate with a team committed to educating others and highlighting meaningful developments in pharmacy. It allows me to engage with content that informs and inspires, while also connecting my passion for reading and writing with my professional interests. I look forward to supporting the Post's mission through thoughtful editorial work and continued learning.



**Gabriella Beharry**  
**Staff Editor**

Being a part of the Rho Chi Post gives me the opportunity to combine my passion for healthcare with my interest in writing and communication. I value having a platform where I can help share knowledge, highlight important issues in pharmacy, and contribute to meaningful discussions within our community.



# MEET THE TEAM



**Jeannette Pauline Ho**

**Staff Editor**

The Rho Chi Post is the esteemed publication of the Rho Chi Society at St. John's University, dedicated to showcasing the scholarship and professional achievements of our student pharmacists and faculty. It serves as a platform to share knowledge, foster dialogue, and inspire leadership within the pharmacy community. Through its pages, we honor the pursuit of excellence and the collective advancement of our profession.

**Ansha Hamid**

**Staff Editor**

Being a part of the Rho Chi Post allows for a great opportunity to engage with the ever-evolving world of pharmacy. It is a platform where I can dive deep into issues that directly impact our profession, from groundbreaking research on new drug therapies to the implications of political changes on the pharmaceutical industry. This role allows me to contribute to a well-informed community, connecting with students and faculty, by providing valuable insights and promoting a deeper understanding of the science and art of pharmacy.



**Maimuna Maula**

**Staff Editor**

When I entered pharmacy school, I have heard the name "Rho Chi Post" pop up a few times. I opened it once and I saw there were so many articles written by the same students that were walking amongst us all, both above and below my year. I wrote for a magazine club in high school, so a part of me wanted to join this newsletter as well. But I didn't feel like I was worthy enough, because my level of pharmacy knowledge wasn't expansive enough at the time. I had no idea what to write about, and all the articles written by those students felt intimidating to me. I just was not ready. Now in my sixth year, of course I am still not an absolute pro in pharmacy - but I have learned so much over the years, and even just in these short few months during my APPEs. I want to give back to the profession while I am still a student in any way I can.



# MEET THE TEAM



**Rebecca Sabzanov**  
**Senior Staff Writer**

Being part of Rho Chi Post is an exciting opportunity for me to merge my passions for writing and pharmacy in a prestigious organization. I'm enthusiastic to contribute to such a respectful organization and collaborate with other members of the Rho Chi Post to produce meaningful content that will impact others.

**Sariah Grant**  
**Senior Staff Writer**

Being part of the Rho Chi Post is a meaningful opportunity to enhance my writing skills and apply the medical knowledge I'm learning to educate my peers. I'm passionate about empowering others through information, and I aspire to continue sharing medical insights that help the public make more informed health decisions.



**Ameena Qadri**  
**Senior Staff Writer**

Being a member of the Rho Chi post means a great deal to me because it is the perfect outlet for me to write about pharmacy related topics that interest me the most. I feel that the Ro Chi post will also allow me to develop my writing skills both professionally and creatively.



**Michelle Flores**  
**Senior Staff Writer**

My name is Michelle Flores, and I am an incoming fifth-year pharmacy student. Being a Staff Writer for the Rho Chi Post is an exciting opportunity to contribute to the dissemination of relevant and evolving pharmacy news. In a field that is constantly advancing, staying informed is essential—not only for providing the best possible care to our patients, but also for growing as future healthcare professionals. I'm grateful for the chance to be part of a community that values knowledge, collaboration, and continuous learning.



# MEET THE TEAM



**Amanda Nakhul**  
**Staff Writer**

My name is Amanda Nakhul and I'm a junior biomedical sciences major on the pre-med track. I've been writing for Rho Chi Post for about a year, and it is an honor to be a part of a high-quality collaborative organization such as this. As a Staff Writer I am able to incorporate my passion for writing with my appreciation for Pharmacy and medicine. I can't wait for a successful and educational year.

**Amanda Kastel**  
**Staff Writer**

In recent years, there has been growing distrust in the field of medicine, extending from the general public and even to political leadership. As a P3 pharmacy student, I feel a strong responsibility to counteract this widespread medical misinformation. Contributing to the Rho Chi Post- a team rooted in clinical knowledge and dedicated to unbiased research- is the ideal opportunity to support this mission.



**Aymon Choudhury**  
**Staff Writer**

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# MEET THE TEAM



**Armanda Dervishi**

**Staff Writer**

To me, being part of the Rho Chi Post is about more than just writing articles; it's about connecting with others, sharing ideas, and celebrating the amazing things happening in our community. As a Staff Writer, I'm excited to explore topics that matter to us as students and future pharmacists. And as Engagement & Outreach Coordinator, I'm really looking forward to helping more people feel included and involved in what we do. I'm grateful to be part of a team that values creativity, collaboration, and meaningful communication.

**Rabtah Jinan**

**Staff Writer**

Being a part of the Rho Chi Post offers an invaluable opportunity to connect with peers while advancing my skills as a writer and communicator. I look forward to enhancing my proficiency in scientific writing, navigating research databases, and staying informed on updates in pharmacy. In my roles as Staff Writer and Outreach Director, I am eager to foster networks with fellow students and contribute meaningfully to the pharmacy community.



**Ansha Hamid**

**Staff Writer**

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## MEET THE TEAM



**Archana Murugan**  
Staff Writer

Being a part of Rho Chi Post is a meaningful opportunity for me to grow as an aspiring pharmacist and an advocate for the profession. I'm truly excited to learn and work with my peers while giving back to the pharmacy community.

# MEET THE TEAM

## Social Media & Outreach



**Aymon Choudhury**  
**Engagement & Outreach Manager**

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# MEET THE TEAM

## Advisors



**Dr. Ketan Patel**  
**MPharm, PhD**

It is an honor to serve as a faculty advisor of Beta Delta Chapter of a 100-year-old prestigious society of pharmaceutical professionals – The Rho Chi Society. With great enthusiasm, I am committed to assist the Rho Chi member's endeavors in: (1) disseminating the latest information/technology in healthcare system; (2) promoting pharmaceutical field & career propulsive networking of current students, alumni, and faculties; and (3) facilitating the scholastic activities and recognizing the scholars.

**Dr. Mohammad Rattu**  
**PharmD, BCOP, BCPS, BCGP**

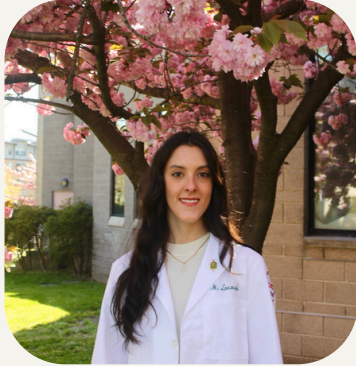
I am thankful to have been the 2012 editor-in-chief of the Rho ChiPost newsletter, as well as on the 2019 alumni honor roll of the national Rho Chi organization. This is one of the most successful longitudinal projects at my alma mater, as evidenced by its decade-long persistence and teams of highly-motivated students. I remain available for professional support and assistance with the new year's initiatives.



# The Rho Chi Society

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## Executive Board



**Michelle Laszczych**

### President

The Rho Chi Pharmacy Honor Society recognizes and celebrates academic excellence, leadership, and service in the pharmaceutical sciences. The mission of the Rho Chi Beta Delta Chapter is to provide students with opportunities to connect with faculty, alumni, and peers through programs that foster scholarship, professionalism, and lifelong learning. Through academic committees, mentorship initiatives, networking, and service events, Rho Chi empowers students to expand their knowledge, cultivate leadership skills, and prepare for successful careers in pharmacy. Membership in Rho Chi is not only an honor but also a commitment to advancing the profession and supporting the growth and success of fellow students.

**Reyaz Mussaleen**

### Vice President

The Rho Chi Society encourages a lifelong passion for learning while empowering students to grow as leaders and advocates in pharmacy. Throughout my journey, the opportunities and experiences provided by Rho Chi have strengthened my professionalism and fueled my determination to achieve my highest potential. Membership in Rho Chi represents more than academic recognition—it reflects a dedication to excellence and integrity in every facet of pharmacy practice. As Vice President, my goal is to motivate fellow members and future students to challenge themselves both academically and personally, while upholding the values of scholarship, leadership, and service that define our organization.



**Ida Lu**

### Secretary

The Rho Chi Society cultivates a community where students can learn from one another and grow together on their professional journeys. It serves as a platform to strengthen leadership, communication, and collaboration while inspiring members to strive for excellence in pharmacy. Beyond academics, it provides a supportive and inclusive space where every member can find their voice, explore their passions, and make a meaningful contribution to the field.



**Gjoana Gjoni**

### Treasurer

The Rho Chi Society represents a commitment to academic excellence, integrity, and leadership within the field of pharmacy. It's about using the knowledge and experiences we've gained to uplift others and pass that knowledge down to other pharmacy students.

As members, we lead by example and strive to make a meaningful impact within our school and profession. We are dedicated to fostering a supportive academic environment where collaboration and mentorship are valued. Rho Chi encourages us to continue growing not just as students, but as future pharmacists.



# The Rho Chi Society

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## Executive Board



**Noor-ul-ain Buksh**

**Historian**

Rho Chi's society honors the accomplishments of outstanding pharmacy students and gives them opportunities to branch out and connect with others. Through community-building events, such as the review sessions and coffee chats, students can learn from peers and professionals while developing a sense of belonging. There is a feeling of gratitude that comes with being in Rho Chi, whether it be when a student appreciates your guidance or genuinely benefits from the resources we offer. Rho Chi is more than just celebrating the "GPA", it is a meaningful way to give back and grow alongside others within the pharmacy community.

**Sarah El-Rowmeim**

**Academic Committee Chair**

The Rho Chi Society recognizes academic excellence while providing a space to grow as leaders, mentors, and future pharmacists. Membership creates opportunities to extend our impact beyond the classroom—through community service, peer support, and academic initiatives that strengthen our community. Rho Chi also emphasizes bridging the knowledge we gain in pharmacy school toward post-graduate goals and real-world application. It serves as both an honor and a responsibility to advance the profession, support one another, and shape the future of pharmacy.



**Basmalla Hussein**

**Academic Committee Chair**

The Rho Chi Society fosters an environment where students uplift one another and advance collectively in their pursuit of professionalism. It offers opportunities to build leadership, networking, and problem-solving skills while motivating members to pursue the highest standards in pharmacy. More than an academic honor, it represents a welcoming community that values inclusivity, encourages exploration, and empowers each member to leave a lasting impact on the profession.



**Paulina Maczko**

**Leads Mentorship Chair**

The Rho Chi Society stands for academic excellence, professionalism, and leadership in pharmacy. It's about using what we've learned to support and guide others, while continuing to challenge ourselves to grow. As members, we work to create an environment where collaboration, mentorship, and curiosity are valued, helping prepare us not just for success as students, but for our future roles as pharmacists.

