

*The inventive spirit*

# ENERGIZING

*independent pharmacy*

**Community pharmacists show their versatility and creativity to tackle challenges in an ever-changing health care environment**

by Jay Williams, director of marketing and communications for CPESN® USA

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Within independent community-based pharmacy, there certainly isn't a lack of innovation. Innovation and inventiveness are everywhere. Most times, it is a failure to adopt the innovation with other community-based pharmacies that causes the lack of awareness across America. In the next few pages we share great examples of the inventive spirit of independent pharmacy that perhaps you can adopt as your own.



# PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH WELLNESS



*“Our independence gives us the freedom to pay attention to our patients and what they need the most. And our passion for our patients pushes us to find solutions and be inventive.”*



*Andrea Kowalski*

Want to talk about innovation? Just start with **Andrea Kowalski**, pharmacist and director of clinical services at

Shivers Pharmacy, a multi-store independent pharmacy in southeast Ohio. “One of the things that I love about independent pharmacies is their inventive and innovative mindset,” Andrea says.

And her pharmacy is a great example. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Shivers’ pharmacists and pharmacy staff noticed the effect of lockdowns and isolation on many of their regular customers. “Our patients were not able to visit the pharmacy and interact with the staff and other patients. We could sense the toll it was taking on their mental health,” Andrea says.

So, Andrea and her colleagues designed consultations geared to assessing a patient’s anxiety (using the General Anxiety Disorder-7, or GAD-7) and depression (using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9, or PHQ-9). Consultations were conducted over the phone during the pandemic.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. What was once a taboo topic, especially in rural southeastern Ohio, was now being tackled head-on. Andrea firmly believes the local, trusting relationships the pharmacy has earned with its customers make the difference.

Pharmacists were able to provide resources or lifestyle changes to help improve mental health. High scores were referred to a physician. After nearly two years of data, the numbers are significant. During follow-up visits, 73 percent of patients said their mental health improved or

stayed the same from the previous visit. Even more valuable, the 27 percent of patients who reported worsening symptoms of depression or anxiety were able to be identified through this program and receive next-level treatment.

The program is now part of a pilot payer program that allows Shivers Pharmacy to bill the insurance company in the pilot directly for their pharmacists’ time. Andrea hopes the program expands to other independent pharmacies within its CPESN Ohio clinically integrated network.

“Our independence gives us the freedom to pay attention to our patients and what they need the most,” Andrea says. “And our passion for our patients pushes us to find solutions and be inventive.”

# LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS



Bretton decided to bring his technology into one central location that would become the prescription filling hub for all 12 of his pharmacies. His team operates five PASS Medication Adherence Robots and four Parata Max 2 machines at the Care-Fill LTC facility, in conjunction with, a PASS Pivot, a Max Pivot, a Parata Safe Loader, a Perl Medication Inspection Device and Eyecon Counting Technology. The Parata Max 2 machines handle both regular prescriptions and 340B prescriptions. Patients can choose to have their medications hand-delivered to their doorstep or routed to the closest location for drive-thru or curbside pickup service.

Just mention the word innovation, and pharmacist **Bretton Walberg** gets excited to share all that is happening at Walberg Family Pharmacies. Along with his wife Stacey, Bretton owns and operates 12 Walberg Family Pharmacies across western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio.

With a passion for technology, Bretton started using Parata high-speed automation solutions within seven of his busier locations years ago. The pill-counting and vial-filling technology handled their high-paced prescription filling and allowed the pharmacy staff more time to complete medication therapy management, consult with patients, and more. It was an effective operation that probably would still be in existence today, but then the pandemic hit.

With the staff at each of his pharmacies battling the harsh reality of fast-moving changes to pharmacy practice during the pandemic, Bretton once again turned to technology to help with this new challenge.

"The pandemic just made me look at our operations differently," Bretton says. "At each location, we were juggling the staff schedule, administering thousands of vaccinations (Walberg Family Pharmacies has administered over 60,000 to date), launching an appointment scheduler for patients to use, and documenting patient care activities made possible through payer contracts secured by PPCN (Pennsylvania Pharmacists Care Network, the CPESN network in the state).

"It was a lot."

"By letting the machines do the counting and accuracy checking, we are far more efficient," Bretton says. "Better yet, the staff at each of our locations is now focused on patient care initiatives, like administering vaccinations, providing medication management, and handling MTM cases."

Bretton shared that in a single month the revenue increased by more than \$10,000 by simply having the time to focus on patient care via PPCN programs and Outcomes MTM services.

Bretton believes other independent pharmacies can make this model work, especially in states that allow co-mingling of inventory from separate pharmacies, like Pennsylvania. With the implementation of the central fill process, their entire inventory was reduced from over \$1.4 million to below \$900,000.

"The injection of \$500,000 of cash flow has made our company more financially stable. Central fill has also allowed us to considerably drive down the cost to dispense. With central fill, we have the opportunity to help reduce the cost to dispense, free employee time and lower drug costs via warehouse purchasing," Bretton says. "Central fill has provided the solution for staff shortages, proper time allocation for new streams of revenue, and cost containment."

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# LAUNCHING CLINICAL INITIATIVES

Providing better patient care in the communities they serve and improving performance on clinical initiatives was the driving force behind Good Day Pharmacy's decision to apply for a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention (DHDSP) grant to participate in its Well-Integrated Screening and Evaluation for Women Across the Nation (WISEWOMAN) program.

Pharmacist and clinical operations manager **Whitney Osborn** manages the program for Good Day Pharmacy, an independent pharmacy with 11 locations in north central Colorado. For WISEWOMAN, Good Day Pharmacy has contracted with a local clinic that serves as Whitney's base of operations.

"We work with low-income, underinsured women aged 40 to 64 to help them understand their risk for heart disease and stroke," Whitney says. "Many of these women are unaware of their high blood pressure and the impact of prolonged high blood pressure has on their long-term health."

*"We've realized some significant benefits of combining a pharmacist's knowledge of medicine with the WISEWOMAN support materials."*

The program provides heart disease and stroke risk factor counseling sessions, and Whitney provides information and inspiration to promote heart-healthy lifestyles. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment covers the pharmacists' time counseling patients and running the program.

"We are the only pharmacy in the WISEWOMAN program. We've realized some significant benefits of combining a pharmacist's knowledge of medicine with the WISEWOMAN support materials," Whitney says. "Together, we can more successfully inform and promote healthy behaviors to our targeted patients."



*Good Day Pharmacy has implemented a clinical program reaching out to women potentially at risk for heart disease and stroke.*

The next goal for Whitney and the Good Day Pharmacy team is an expansion of the program to clinics in other communities where the pharmacy already has a strong presence. It's just another example of independent pharmacies investing in positive outcomes in their communities.

# COLLABORATING FOR HEALTHY LIFESTYLES



*“One of the biggest mistakes with independent pharmacy is not collaborating with other independent pharmacies and sharing the great ideas they have.”*

**Dan Bosley** lights up when talking about his Farmacy program. Farmacy is a partnership between non-profit AdkAction and Keeseville Pharmacy, where they team with local farmers to bring healthy food to people in the rural communities around Keeseville, N.Y., near the Canadian border. Dan is the owner of Keeseville Pharmacy and has both his pharmacy and the Farmacy located in the same building.

Dan loves the cyclical nature of the program's benefits. Local farmers benefit by selling more produce. The people in his local community benefit by receiving healthy fruits and vegetables they wouldn't normally access easily (Keeseville doesn't have a year-round grocery store). By eating healthier, the pharmacy's patients can live healthier and, hopefully, longer lives.

“It is near impossible to have an impactful conversation about high blood pressure or diabetes with a patient without discussing diet,”

Dan says. “I try to get all of our pharmacy's patients to understand the impact of nutrition on their health.”

Dan hopes that other independent pharmacies consider launching a food-pharmacy program like his. He's shared his journey with others at conferences and in one-on-one settings. (*America's Pharmacist*<sup>®</sup> profiled Dan in the December 2019 issue, available at [bit.ly/pharmerdan19](http://bit.ly/pharmerdan19).)

“One of the biggest mistakes with independent pharmacy is not collaborating with other independent pharmacies and sharing the great ideas they have,” Dan says. “Take Farmacy, for example. Most pharmacy owners don't realize that they can probably secure grant money from their local health department to make it go. They just need to ask and then deliver results.”

CPESN<sup>®</sup> USA willingly shares best practices across its pharmacy network. And, in the case of COVID best practices, CPESN USA

collaboratively shared with all community-based pharmacies.

“That is what CPESN USA does best,” Dan says. “The pharmacists in CPESN networks share best practices and their inventive ideas. It is a big reason why I joined and remain in CPESN Upstate NY.”

If you have a great example of the inventive spirit of independent pharmacy you'd like to share, please do so. Send your best practices to [jwilliams@cpesn.com](mailto:jwilliams@cpesn.com) and we'll share your innovation for all independent pharmacies to see.

“Just look at the innovation coming out of independent pharmacy!” Dan says. “We do it all while filling most of our prescriptions below cost and being assessed unknown fees via the PBMs.”

Imagine the inventiveness that could be generated by independent pharmacies if they didn't bear that burden. ■