



CENTENNIAL PHARMACY SERVICES

# PIONEERING LONG-TERM CARE PHARMACY AT HOME

## Centennial Pharmacy Services, a family business on the forefront of pharmacy care

by Rebecca Bertuch

In the heart of inner-city America, where community pharmacies often serve as more than medicine dispensaries, Philadelphia-based Centennial Pharmacy Services stands as a testament to the transformative power of dedication and innovation. It is owned and operated by the Dymowski family, visionaries who have not only owned and operated community pharmacies but have helped pioneer the challenging landscape of long-term care pharmacy at home.

“Our motto has always been ‘As a family, we can do anything.’ We’ve lived by that creed,” Lindsay Dymowski Constantino says. “We’re driven to redefine the role of pharmacy in health care through LTC at home, knowing that together and with our trusted partners, there’s no limit to what we can accomplish.”

### AN UNLIKELY ORIGIN

The tale of the Dymowski family’s entry into the pharmacy world begins in the unlikeliest of places – a lively casino where Joe Dymowski was serving as a craps dealer. It was amid the clatter of dice and the flicker of neon lights that Joe decided to take a gamble on his career, charting a new course for his family’s future by choosing to pursue a college education. Joe orchestrated a life

change, simultaneously dealing cards at night and taking chem 101 during the day.

“Going back to school was a decision driven by a desire for something more – for myself and for my family,” says Joe, who received his PharmD from the Temple University School of Pharmacy. “I knew that pursuing a career in pharmacy would not only provide better opportunities for us but also allow me to make a meaningful difference in people’s lives.”

At the heart of this journey was Cindi, Joe’s steadfast companion and co-pilot in the pursuit of a new dream. The decision to go back to school wasn’t just a personal ambition; it was a familial commitment that both Joe and Cindi embraced wholeheartedly. This family’s journey into pharmacy was part of a shared passion that would shape their legacy for generations to come.

Recognizing the significance of Joe’s educational pursuit, Cindi made a life-altering decision of her own – she left her job as a medical assistant to create a supportive home environment for Joe and their growing family. Her sacrifice became the bedrock upon which Joe’s journey rested.



*Cindi Dymowski put her career on bold to help support the family pharmacy business.*

“Backing Joe’s decision to pursue pharmacy school wasn’t just about being a supportive wife,” Cindi says. “It was about believing in our family’s potential to create something meaningful together.”

Lindsay and Joey, the youngest members of the family, were not just spectators; they were active participants in their parents’ journey. From the late-night shifts at the casino to the sacrifice of leaving a stable job, the kids were exposed to the realities of pursuing one’s dreams against all odds.

“From a young age, our children have been actively involved in our business, instilling in them a deep sense of pride, purpose, and responsibility,” Cindi says.

### AN EMPTY STOREFRONT CHANGES EVERYTHING

After Joe’s graduation and a stint in the retail pharmacy industry, an encounter with an empty storefront sparked the idea of opening a



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pharmacy. However, courage wasn't in abundance until a fateful day when Cindi took the initiative, calling the realtor and encouraging Joe that opening a pharmacy was something they could accomplish together. In 2008, the family opened its first pharmacy.

Lindsay and Joey's involvement in the pharmacy transcended conventional family ties.

“Tasks like stocking drug bottles and cleaning shelves weren't just chores; they were lessons in the nuts and bolts of running a pharmacy,” says Lindsay, “Our allowance wasn't earned by making beds but by operating the cash register.”

As the kids grew, they attended contract meetings, faxed inventory orders, sourced marketing, and completed state forms. The early exposure to the intricacies of the pharmacy not only solidified their connection to the family business but also became the foundation for their future roles in the growth and success of Centennial Pharmacy Services.

### **GETTING MEDICATIONS ON TRACK**

Around 2012, as their pharmacy expanded both in patient numbers and locations, the family keenly observed shifts within the pharmacy industry. Nestled in the heart of Philadelphia, a city grappling with health illiteracy,

the family discerned a landscape fraught with errors in patient medication plans.

“Interactions, non-adherence, poly-pharmacy, overreliance on the ER instead of primary care physicians, and a lack of accountability for patients' medications were glaring issues,” Lindsay says. “In response, we instated an ‘all meds’ program across their pharmacies.”

Under this initiative, while the family preferred to fill all a patient's medications, they insisted on having the most up-to-date medication list from all the patient's providers before dispensing any medication. Monthly, they meticulously reviewed these lists with patients, addressed any discrepancies or preferences with providers, consolidated a comprehensive medication list, and distributed it to all the patient's registered providers. Simultaneously, they provided all the patient's medications in compliance packaging on the same day each month.

“We had to completely rethink our approach to pharmacy workflow,” says Joey. “Instead of just filling prescriptions, we needed to focus on proactive, clinical, high-touch initiatives. It meant encouraging our pharmacists to step out from behind the counter, put on their white coats, and engage with patients on a deeper level. It was a paradigm shift, but it allowed us to deliver a higher

standard of care and truly make a difference in our patients' lives.”

The effect of these policies was transformative. Providers contacted the pharmacy for support with patients whose medication regimens posed challenges. Patients experienced deprescribing of unnecessary medications, and the chaos of erratic calls or contentious interactions at the pickup counter diminished. The pharmacy adopted a structured schedule, reminiscent of a doctor's office, knowing which patients needed medicine on specific days. This newfound organization allowed the Centennial staff more time to concentrate on additional patient care initiatives, such as comprehensive medication reviews, vaccinations, and blood pressure assessments.

“We realized we didn't have a ‘pharmacy,’ but instead a medication management company,” Lindsay says.

Recognizing the potential in this shift, Centennial invested in adherence packaging robots to enhance patients' independence in medication dispensing at home. It also expanded its team to include team members in pharmacy, such as nurses, establishing a stronger presence within doctors' offices.

As Centennial transitioned into a medication management provider, it began receiving requests for

collaboration from integrated health systems, managed care organizations, and home care agencies seeking pharmacy support. Anticipating the changing needs of its growing population, Centennial invested in training delivery drivers. Concurrently, the demographic of its patient base extended beyond the confines of its zip code. This geographical expansion coincided with an uptick in disease management requirements; their patients were increasingly chronically ill, more complex, and more confined to their homes. The pharmacy's commitment to evolving with the needs of its patients positioned Centennial as a crucial partner to providers.

"When my daughter first introduced the idea of a traditionally LTC adherence packaging machine to our community-based patients, I wasn't sure if she was on to something revolutionary or if she was just crazy," Joe says. "But her unwavering belief in this vision was truly inspiring. It pushed our family to work harder every day, to dive deeper into the operational side of the business, and to ensure that we could provide the level of pharmacy care that this 'adherence-based pharmacy' (now LTC-at-home) model needed."

### PRACTICE EVOLUTION

The transition resulted in the evolution of Centennial's pharmacy practice. The Dymowskis, not content with the traditional role of a pharmacy, sought to redefine it, steering it back to its roots as a vital component of community health care. They aimed not only to dispense medications but to play a crucial role in the overall well-being of their patients. They had started the LTC-at-home model, and at the time, they didn't even realize it. By 2014, the Centennial brand was born, focusing on LTC at home.

Breaking free from the conventional perception of pharmacies, the Dymowskis were determined to position pharmacy at the forefront of community-based health.

"We recognized that we wouldn't get far without acceptance from the traditional providers in the community," Lindsay says. Overcoming the initial skepticism from health care professionals, home care agencies, and payers, the family individualized its services to meet provider needs, evolving into a pharmacy that played a vital role in the care team.

Centennial navigated the challenges of persuading a traditionally cautious health care industry. It tailored its services with precision, aligning them with the specific needs of a demographic often deemed high-risk for providers. These were individuals with multiple chronic conditions, using multiple medications, frequently lower-income, and often situated in health care disparity locations.

Whether living independently or with a caregiver, these patients demanded additional support, extending beyond medicine management to include vital aspects such as transportation, meal preparation and other instrumental activities of daily living.

### STAYING HOME

The Dymowskis knew that these patients were not a rarity in the realm of health care, but what set them apart was their choice to remain at home instead of opting for institutional care. They were people embracing the challenge of aging in their familiar communities, guided by personal preferences or financial constraints that rendered facility-based care unattainable.

*Joey and Lindsay (previous page) cut their teeth in pharmacy at a young age.*



Regardless of where they laid their heads at night, the level of pharmacy support they required mirrored that of individuals in facilities. Centennial emerged as a key support system for those patients, their caregivers, and their providers, bridging the gap for these individuals who chose to age at home and determined to provide a level of support that mirrored what they would receive within a facility setting.

"The decision to formally shift from being recognized as a community retail pharmacy to a LTC-at-home pharmacy wasn't just a strategic move; it was a response to the evolving needs of the patient population," Lindsay says. Acknowledging the inherent complexity of their patients, surpassing the typical profile of a community retail patient, and recognizing that their pharmacy services extended well beyond the

boundaries of a traditional community retail pharmacy, the Dymowski family saw an opportunity to make a more significant imprint on the entire industry.

### SHIFT BRINGS CHALLENGES

This shift brought its challenges, particularly in proving the concept and changing perceptions within the pharmacy industry. The Dymowskis had to demonstrate that a pharmacy could be more than a transactional space; it could be an integral part of a patient's home-based care.

"Educating other health care providers about the role of pharmacists in patient care was a continuous effort" Joe says. "We had to communicate our capabilities, showcase our clinical skills, and highlight the positive effect of pharmacist-led interventions. Over time, as they witnessed the tangible benefits of pharmacist involvement, their perceptions began to shift, and collaboration became more seamless."

Seeing the benefits of LTC at home, the family realized their objective wasn't only to support providers with medication adherence initiatives. They were trying to change the narrative as the industry grappled with shrinking reimbursements, increasingly nontransparent contracts, and a distressing trend of independent pharmacies closing their doors. Their belief was grounded in the notion that if a pharmacy could deliver comprehensive support to a specific patient population, resulting in positive metric outcomes, then the reimbursement structure for the pharmacy should reflect the value provided. Furthermore, it advocated for a reevaluation of the classification of pharmacies based not on where the patient is residing, but instead the level of care the patient required.

### NOT ALONE

Fortunately, the Dymowskis didn't find themselves alone at the starting line. Industry players had already recognized the trend of increasingly complex patients opting to age at home. LTC PSAOs were among the first to acknowledge that a pharmacy could deliver LTC services to patients in the community. The more forward-thinking of these organizations began crafting contracts for what they termed "combo-shop" pharmacies.

Recognizing the potential in these newly formulated initiatives, the Dymowskis swiftly embraced the opportunity to champion their validity within the industry. They were aware that allies existed – individuals and organizations who believed in the family's commitment to providing an elevated level of service to a more complex population choosing to age in place. This conviction fueled their determination to advocate for pharmacy to be acknowledged for the value of service provided, shifting the focus from where the service was rendered to the quality of care delivered.

To overcome skepticism and garner support, the family deepened their partnerships with organizations that shared their vision. Whether these collaborators arrived at the table independently or were influenced by Centennial's demonstrated proof of concept, a collective effort emerged. Overcoming similar challenges they once faced while establishing Centennial, the family set out to gain respect from industry leaders, plans, and payers. This required not only persistence but a commitment to proving the value of LTC at home.

"One of the biggest challenges we faced was convincing industry stakeholders of the value of our pharmacy model," Joe says. "We encountered



*A family affair: The Dymowskis are focused on providing state-of-the-art care for LTC-at-home patients.*





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#### **MULTIFACETED STRATEGIES**

In its journey to advocate for higher reimbursements, contract transparency, alternative contracts, and general LTC-at-home awareness, Centennial engaged in multifaceted strategies. It conducted meetings, both formal and informal, with pharmacy industry stakeholders, associations, advocacy groups, health departments, and policymakers, presenting compelling cases for the effect of LTC-at-home services on patient outcomes. Webinars became a crucial platform for sharing insights and educating not only industry stakeholders but also fellow pharmacies. Through these webinars, the family demystified the intricacies of LTC at home, shedding light on the benefits and positive outcomes achieved by the model. They compiled and presented data to wholesalers, PSAsOs, providers, plans, and payers, illustrating the profound impact of the LTC-at-home model compared to traditional retail pharmacy approaches.

#### **ENGAGING IN COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS**

The family engaged in collaborative efforts with providers and plans to share insights into the positive health and metric outcomes experienced by patients under the care of an LTC-at-home pharmacy. Furthermore, the model demonstrated monetary opportunities for cost savings and benefits within the value-based health care system, which have incentivized plans, providers, and payers to recognize LTC-at-home pharmacy.

The parties involved, from health care providers to plans, witnessed the ability of a pharmacy to enhance a care team when the pharmacy provided the proper level of service to a specific patient. The outcomes witnessed extended beyond individual patient stories; they encapsulated a broader narrative of success of caring for a chronically ill patient who was not in a facility.

The tangible and measurable successes achieved by Centennial underscored the viability of the LTC-at-home model, setting a new standard for pharmacy care in the evolving landscape of home-based patient-centric health care.

“At the heart of everything we do, it all goes back to patient-centric pharmacy care,” Lindsay says. “While metrics, adherence programs, and workflows are essential components, they all stem from our commitment to putting the patient first. The LTC-at-home model thrives because it is fundamentally rooted in providing personalized, patient-centered care that improves outcomes and enhances quality of life. It’s not just about increasing reimbursements or optimizing ROI; it’s about delivering the highest standard of pharmacy care that prioritizes the well-being and satisfaction of every patient we serve.” ■

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## LTC@H NETWORK LOOKS TO RESHAPE LTC-AT-HOME LANDSCAPE

As Centennial Pharmacy Services continues its journey, the Dymowski family is not content with just operating a successful pharmacy. Their goals for the long-term care-at-home model extend far beyond Centennial, giving rise to the inception of the Long-Term Care at Home Pharmacy Network (LTC@H Network). Harnessing its extensive experience, the family is dedicated to reshaping the community pharmacy landscape and propelling LTC at home into the premier model of pharmacy. The family endeavors, alongside its partner PharmaComplete, to demystify the dynamic landscape of LTC at home, contributing to the overall growth and success of the entire industry.

The LTC@H Network is a centralized hub of information for the pharmacy industry, specifically focusing on long-term care at home.

Furthermore, the LTC@H Network is a Special Purpose Network with CPESN. CPESN LTC@HOME is a comprehensive resource for pharmacies, offering education, compliance tools, and best practices, tailored for success in LTC@Home.

“Our mission is multifaceted – supporting community retail pharmacies seeking engagement with the LTC-at-home population, assisting LTC pharmacies in expanding from facility-based discharge to community integration, educating plans, payers, and contracting entities, fostering initiatives, credentialing, regulatory compliance, policy initiatives, and assuming a leadership role in the LTC-at-home sector,” says Lindsay Dymowski Constantino, LTC@H Network president.

