

Best of both worlds

Clinical programs create revenue opportunities and enhanced patient care

Articles written and provided by CPESN® USA

To say that the last few years have been turbulent for independent community pharmacy would be an understatement. The reasons are clear and all too familiar. PBM practices are leading to the closure of pharmacies every day and pushing even more independent pharmacy owners and patients ever closer to a breaking point. In recent years, DIR fees, high prescription costs, low reimbursement, and lack of transparency are just a few of the litany of issues independent pharmacists have had to battle.

However, at the same time, and in particular during the COVID-19 public health emergency, pharmacy and pharmacists showed they were ready, willing and able to respond to challenges, stepping up and providing critical patient services in a time of crisis and need. Many provided COVID-19 testing and later administered lots of COVID-19 vaccinations, to name just a few initiatives. Since then, independent pharmacies have continued to build their clinical infrastructure, all with the goal of helping their patients live healthier lives.

In the pages that follow we share the stories of several independent pharmacies that have done a deep dive into innovative clinical services. They are partnering with state and local governments and employee health plans to enhance patient care and bring added revenue to their bottom lines, which is critical in uncertain times. And that might be part of the Rx to help independent pharmacies not only survive, but thrive.





Dayna Wong-Otis

CLINICAL SERVICES MANAGER KTA PHARMACY HAWAII ISLAND, HAWAII

KTA Pharmacy has four locations on Hawaii island, or the “Big Island” as some call it. **Dayna Wong-Otis** is the clinical services manager of its primary location in Hilo, and she’s a driving force behind KTA Pharmacy’s success.

KTA Pharmacy has an impressive array of clinical pharmacy services that generate revenue and support pharmacy operations. Making money by providing clinical services is no longer a dream or a magical unicorn. Independent community-based pharmacies are making money – KTA’s revenue is growing by an average of 250 percent yearly – by providing clinical services alongside filling prescriptions. KTA Pharmacy is a bright, shining example of this success.

One clinical service the pharmacy offers is diabetes self-management education and support (DSMES). The pharmacy completed accreditation in 2017 and rented a separate space to offer in-person sessions.

“We were able to go to local private practices and tell them about our new services,” Dayna says. “They helped us to promote it and started referring patients to us.” With KTA Pharmacy, the initial session is one-on-one and then the patient moves to group sessions. More than 300 patients have participated in this program. KTA Pharmacy charges health insurance plans for the DSMES services provided.

“There is limited access to diabetes education opportunities on the Big Island,” Dayna says. “Our local providers continue to refer new patients to us so we can help them

with lifestyle changes necessitated by their diabetes diagnosis.”

Another effective clinical offering is its diabetes prevention program (DPP) started in 2019. KTA Pharmacy has turned three of its technicians into certified lifestyle coaches. KTA is a Medicare DPP supplier, and its coaches work directly with prediabetes patients to make lifestyle changes to reduce their risk of progression to type 2 diabetes. Nearly 50 patients have already taken advantage of the program.

Along with her role with KTA Pharmacy, Dayna is also the facilitator for CPESN® USA Hawaii, the state’s clinically integrated network. CPESN Hawaii has several programs that provide new reimbursement opportunities for KTA Pharmacy and the 30-plus other independent pharmacies across the Hawaiian islands.

CPESN Hawaii has a contract with a large payer exclusive to its state. This program focuses on adherence and PDC (proportion of days covered) rate and pays the pharmacies for each intervention, including adherence and medication reviews/counseling. Reimbursement is paid on a per-intervention basis and there is a higher reimbursement rate if the completion percentage goals are met. Nearly 650 patients have received an intervention and been positively affected. Participating CPESN pharmacies have earned more than \$33,000 over the past two years through this program.



Wong-Otis photos by Tracey Niimi



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CPESN Hawaii created another payer opportunity for KTA Pharmacy; this one was with the Hawaii Department of Health and was designed to provide vaccinations at licensed care homes (think private homes instead of a nursing home or assisted living facility). KTA Pharmacy offers flu, COVID-19, RSV, and pneumonia vaccinations while visiting these homes. This program started with the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines to get the patients in the licensed care homes vaccinated. More than 120,000 people have received vaccinations through CPESN Hawaii pharmacies. Some of the pharmacies still visit these homes to offer vaccinations to this high-risk population.

A recent DSMES patient shared this about her experience: “I was recently diagnosed with diabetes, and it was a wake-up call that I need to take better care of my health. Attending the DSMES classes through KTA provided me with the education and a better understanding that it is a lifestyle change that requires a lot of discipline and

awareness to make healthier eating choices (no sugar or low sugar options) and to be more active. Dayna was an excellent instructor and I appreciate the positive feedback that she would provide.”

Dayna was also a participant in the inaugural class of the NCPA Innovation Center/CPESN Community Pharmacy Fellowship.

“The fellowship was a great experience! I enjoyed learning from some of the well-respected community pharmacists and pharmacy owners in CPESN networks,” Dayna says. “I enjoyed meeting with my classmates online and networking. My capstone project was to implement POCT (point-of-care testing) at our pharmacies. It was a much-needed service since we were in the middle of the COVID pandemic. We were able to get CLIA waivers and state lab permits for our four locations and POCT protocols to do COVID testing.”

The KTA Pharmacy staff stepped up and quickly implemented this

service, so its customers had access to testing.

“Our clinical services team works with local providers in an effort to educate patients on health topics, such as diabetes and diabetes prevention,” Dayna says. “Our clinical services programs, alongside our community outreach, have allowed our pharmacies to engage with the community and generate awareness of chronic disease prevention and treatment.”

WHAT'S UP NEXT?

Dayna is looking forward to CPESN Hawaii gaining more payer programs. “We currently have four active programs, which is great! For a state comprised of islands, our network pharmacies rise to the challenge,” Dayna says. “When we say ‘CPESN’ here in Hawaii, it’s no longer an introductory conversation. CPESN Hawaii is being recognized here and I think that is something we can all be proud of.”

Scott Adamson

OWNER
MCCRACKEN PHARMACY
WAYNESBURG, PA.

McCracken Pharmacy is nestled in the southwestern corner of Pennsylvania. It has been the bellwether of patient care in Waynesburg since 1961 when it was founded by Jack McCracken. **Scott Adamson** has been the owner-pharmacist since he bought the pharmacy from Jack's son, Jeff.

"We want to help people and be the health care destination for our community ... AND we want to make enough so we can be around for them when they need us," Scott says.

If the recent trend continues, the clinical services they are providing will allow both to happen. McCracken Pharmacy is providing dozens of clinical services for its patients and generating six-figure revenue for its efforts.

When answering the question "How?" Scott offered a multi-pronged answer that started with building his medication synchronization business in 2013.

"Foundationally, you need med sync to gain control of your inventory, manage your prescription volume, and free up staff time to provide clinical services," he says.

Scott says another important component to his pharmacy's growth was what he learned from participating in the two-year Flip the



Pharmacy practice transformation program. It allowed him to build his pharmacy's effort to provide clinical services into the pharmacy's existing workflow and operational model.

The third foundational component was the effort made by the CPESN network in his state, Pennsylvania Pharmacists Care Network (PPCN), to secure payer contracts for him and other pharmacies in his clinically integrated network.

"Stephanie McGrath (executive director) and PPCN worked really, really hard to tell health plans and payers that independent pharmacies are different, and that we take care of patients better than other pharmacies," Scott says. "They secured a number of contracts for us. We are grateful for their trailblazing work."

McCracken Pharmacy has four full-time pharmacists and fills upward of 500 prescriptions each day. More than 80 percent of their total prescriptions filled are through their

med sync program. They have one full-time pharmacist entirely dedicated to providing clinical services and documenting the care it provides in a pharmacist care plan (the mechanism that gets the pharmacy paid).

Through payer contracts with several managed care organizations, there are a number of interventions and activities for which Scott's team can complete, document, and receive reimbursement. Here are just a few:

- Health risk analysis
- Medication synchronization
- Delivery (just once per month)
- Medication review/reconciliation post-hospitalization
- Naloxone co-dispensing

"From the patient's perspective, when the pharmacy reaches out to them, we are effectively telling them that we care about their health. I believe our efforts encourage them to be more thoughtful about their health and to engage us more," Scott says.

“We want to help people and be the health care destination for our community... AND we want to make enough so we can be around for them when they need us.”

From a revenue perspective, McCracken Pharmacy has reached a milestone Scott set for the pharmacy: services are generating enough to cover the salary and expenses for one pharmacist.

McCracken Pharmacy also offers vaccinations. It administered thousands of COVID-19, flu, shingles, RSV, and travel vaccinations over the past year.

WHAT'S UP NEXT?

On the horizon, McCracken Pharmacy will have all of its pharmacists registered with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and recognized as “providers,” which will increase the clinical services they can provide and the reimbursement they can receive. “There is so much potential in this!” Scott exclaimed. “Every pharmacy should shift their focus and get ready ... today.”

Jenny Wells

PHARMACIST-IN-CHARGE THE PHARMACY AT WELLINGTON LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

The Pharmacy at Wellington is located on the western edge of Little Rock, the state’s capital. Like other pharmacies that are successful at launching and offering clinical services, The Pharmacy at Wellington has an operational foundation built on the appointment-based model and medication synchronization. More than 70 percent of the pharmacy’s total prescriptions are filled via its med sync program.

“Med sync is crucial to our pharmacy’s success,” says pharmacist-

in-charge **Jenny Wells**. “It allows you to free up your staff to provide clinical services.”

Implementing med sync might be the only place where both The Pharmacy at Wellington and Wells look like their peers in the community pharmacy industry.

The team at The Pharmacy at Wellington administered numerous vaccines in central Arkansas during the COVID-19 public health emergency, providing more than 22,000 vaccinations before Aug. 1, 2021. It still offers COVID-19, flu, Hepatitis B, MMR, and other vaccines. It even has relationships with the local immigration office to





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administer Hepatitis B vaccine to immigrants, and has relationships with several local school districts so the nurses can refer unvaccinated students to receive MMR vaccine.

The Pharmacy at Wellington was one of the first pharmacies in central Arkansas to offer point-of-care testing for COVID-19. It continues to lead the way in offering a wide variety of tests (including COVID, flu, and strep) and has provided upward of 75 tests each day during flu season. It accepts cash payments and bills some third-party plans for an administrative fee.

“One of the things that makes our pharmacy unique is that we are open seven days a week, from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. during the week and from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays,” Jenny says. “These hours allow us to reach patients when they are in need.”

A recent patient, in need of a strep test, recently spent 2-1/2 hours of her weekend sitting at an urgent care. Eventually her mother used the pharmacy’s online appointment system to schedule a visit for her sick daughter. In less than half the time spent at the urgent care, they arrived at the pharmacy, the strep test was administered, and an antibiotic was prescribed. The patient was grateful for the pharmacy’s accessibility. (Note: In Arkansas, pharmacists can prescribe both antibiotics for patients who test positive for strep and antivirals for those who test positive for flu.)

One pharmacy patient says this about Jenny and her staff: “My husband and I received round two of Shingrix today. Jenny and the staff were very friendly, knowledgeable, and efficient. Not to mention our two previous pharmacies could never

get this immunization. Long live independent pharmacies!”

Another service offering that makes The Pharmacy at Wellington unique is its offering of oral contraceptives – Jenny’s passion project.

With support from the Arkansas Pharmacists Association (APA), Jenny was primarily responsible for organizing and hosting an Oral Contraceptive Boot Camp to educate other independent pharmacies in the state. More than 50 pharmacists attended. The Pharmacy at Wellington charges patients \$75 for the consultation appointment and makes additional revenue filling the prescription. A restrictive women’s services grant with the Arkansas Department of Health and APA allows it to collect cash, charge third-party insurance, or charge the grant.

The Pharmacy at Wellington also offers:

- Nicotine/smoking cessation counseling and prescribing
- HIV antiretroviral PrEP/PEP protocol
- Narcan counseling and prescribing

WHAT’S UP NEXT?

One of Jenny’s pharmacy colleagues was a recent participant in the NCPA Innovation Center/CPESN Fellowship program. Her capstone project was creating a new program using Cognivue’s dementia screening software to identify cognitive decline. It has developed patient materials and staff talk tracks to make it easier to approach a difficult topic.

Kirat Shahiwala

CO-DIRECTOR AND PHARMACIST POWERHOUSE PHARMACY AND TEXAS HEALTH RX PHARMACY DALLAS AND BURLESON, TEXAS

Powerhouse Pharmacy (opened in 2018) in Dallas and Texas Health Rx Pharmacy (opened in 2019) in Burleson, south of Fort Worth, are two relatively new community-based pharmacies managed by co-director and pharmacist **Kirat Shahiwala** and his co-director and pharmacist Neha Patel.

Kirat started his career at a large pharmacy chain but quickly became fatigued due to its focus on prescriptions as opposed to patients. He started working for an independent pharmacy in Michigan and found the work rewarding. “I loved how our pharmacy staff connected with patients. And with proper technician support, I could evaluate the patient, offer clinical guidance, and talk with them,” Kirat says.

Ultimately, that experience led Kirat down the path of running his own pharmacies – although in a much warmer climate in Texas.

Kirat’s pharmacies joined CPESN Texas at the request of pharmacist Angelina Tucker, facilitator for the clinically integrated network. “Angelina told us that we could actually get paid for many of the services we are already providing,” Kirat says. “And she was right.”



A payer program with Elevance Health is administered through CarelonRx and CPESN Texas. This program identifies patients with diabetes, hypertension, or high cholesterol who need intervention. The health plan identifies the patients – some may be patients of the pharmacy already and others may be in the local community but aren’t existing patients. In either case, the pharmacy gets paid by connecting with the patient, providing clinical services, and documenting the care in a pharmacist care plan. Reimbursement is paid on a per documented intervention basis. Each pharmacy has completed enough interventions to generate more than \$30,000 in additional revenue.

It isn't solely about the money. "The Elevance Health program has been very rewarding for the pharmacist-in-charge and the rest of our pharmacy staff," Kirat says. "Engaging the patient and working with them to improve their health is the reason my employees are here."

A recent story underscores how a local, community-connected pharmacy can affect the health of a patient. Elevance/Carelon Rx identified a patient needing intervention. After the initial intervention, the patient filled her blood pressure medication, but not her insulin. Over the next several touch points (with Kirat displaying empathy and building trust during each), the patient shared her reluctance to inject medicine. Kirat's team shifted to counseling the patient on warning signs and symptoms of a potential diabetic coma and encouraged the patient to get her A1c tested and to share those numbers with the pharmacy.

A couple of weeks later, the patient wasn't feeling well and remembered the warning signs shared by Kirat. She decided to go to the emergency room and get checked. She was treated for diabetic ketoacidosis. Afterward, the patient thanked Kirat for his concern and educating her on symptoms. She also trusted his suggestion to overcome her fear of insulin injections and has remained compliant on blood pressure and diabetes medications, including insulin. She routinely engages the pharmacy staff during care planning

sessions and even asks about better diabetes management.

Medication synchronization has been an important foundational piece to the pharmacy's ability to complete clinical opportunities. Both Powerhouse Pharmacy and Texas Health Rx Pharmacy have between 80 percent and 90 percent of their total prescriptions filled using their med sync program.

BestRx pharmacy management software has been valuable to the pharmacy's clinical workflow and another foundational component to its success. Each day, Kirat's team can see the clinical opportunities available via a pharmacy dashboard, usually 10-12 per day.

Beyond the CPESN Texas opportunities, Powerhouse Pharmacy offers point-of-care testing for COVID-19, A1c, and cholesterol. It accepts cash payments for testing. Additionally, it offers a number of vaccinations, including COVID-19, flu, Tdap, Hepatitis A & B, and shingles. It accepts cash payments and will charge third-party insurance for these services.

Kirat says that nearly 90 percent of his pharmacies' clinical revenue is generated from the Elevance Health program.

"The patient has always been important to us," he says. "Now the value we are providing is actually important to the patient." ■

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