

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON SCHOOL OF PHARMACY STUDENT WRITING CLUB:

Business Member Spotlight: Pharm to Tables Charitable Organization

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Editors Note:

The Business Member Spotlight is a feature in The Journal that showcases featured PSW Business Support Member pharmacies. Examples may include but are not limited to: innovative practice model changes, management solutions, professional development opportunities, workflow efficiencies, and quality improvement initiatives.

Day to Day

Pharm to Tables is a 501c3 non-profit organization whose members donate their time to fight hunger in Wisconsin. They work to collect food and raise funds to donate to those in need. Due to their non-profit structure, Pharm to Tables is able to apply an astounding 95% of monetary donations directly to the meal programs they help.

A typical day for the board is consumed by brainstorming new ideas to help promote the organization and writing grant applications. They also focus on developing relationships with the community members that they serve. Pharm to Tables recently collaborated with PSW at the first annual food drive at the Technician Educational Conference on October 7th. The response from this food drive was enormous, gathering a total of 165 pounds of food! Additionally, Pharm to Tables held drives at all three Froedtert & the Medical College of Wisconsin hospitals during Pharmacy Week in October.

As evidenced by their recent success, Pharm to Tables is rapidly becoming a prominent face in the community. Many of the board members are leaders in their professions, maintaining careers outside of the organization. They are also prominent members of the community and use their outside relationships to spread awareness of the organization's cause. John Muchka, the mastermind behind Pharm to Tables, is

an active member of PSW who regularly attends meetings and presented a poster last April at the Educational Conference.

Raising the Bar

From starting as an idea, Pharm to Tables has flourished into a fruitful service organization. By initially setting short and achievable goals, founder John Muchka was able to act on his initial vision of fighting hunger and to reach many through this non-profit group. He emphasizes

"I became a part of Pharm to Tables because I believe it's an organization with a great goal. Food insecurity is a far reaching, chronic problem that not everyone thinks of as an issue in their area. The pharmacy profession is filled with strong community members who are in a position to help end the hunger crisis of our local communities and driven to help others. Given the tools and opportunity to work together, the profession can support local food programs to improve the health of our friends, neighbors and those in need."

-Terry Audley RPh, FASHP

the importance of celebrating even small victories. For example, the positive results from the first annual food drive with PSW technicians provided great reason to celebrate. In the future, he hopes to celebrate expansion of the organization's presence across the state and include PSW meetings as a platform for success.

While the Pharm to Tables organization bears no resemblance to a typical pharmacy or pharmacist role, the service organization engages pharmacists and others to have a dedication to a greater cause. Although none of the board members had training prior to beginning Pharm to Tables, the atypical interprofessional team was carefully selected in order to generate the success that they see today. The organization draws from well-respected community members with a variety of backgrounds, including a lawyer, accountant, and marketing manager to effectively function as one unit. The skills coming from each member contribute uniquely to the operation.

It requires no explanation that the individuals in this group are selfless. They pay it forward day in and day out by providing a forum to collect and administer food to those in need, completely volunteering their time. When asked what qualities make the group successful, Pharm to Tables co-founder, John Muchka, responds with just one word, "compassion." Undoubtedly, this compassion, along with initiative and dedication will propel this group to continue the Pharm to Tables mission into the future.

Bumps in the Road

When John was a pharmacy student in Savannah, Georgia, he volunteered as a mentor at an afterschool program for children of all ages. The center provided a meal to the students that came. Upon

first volunteering, John didn't think much of the center providing a meal, but after a few weeks, he initiated a conversation with one of the middle school students who attended this program every single day. He was shocked to listen to the student's rationale behind his nearly perfect attendance; eating at home was not a guarantee, and the afterschool program provided the only meal that the student consistently received. John made a promise to himself that day that when he graduated and moved back to his home state of Wisconsin, he was going to act on the child's misfortune. A few years later, he started Pharm to Tables with his wife, Lindsey.

Pharm to Tables was John's first experience with starting a non-profit organization, and the learning curve was immense. John and Lindsey conducted a lot of research, asked questions, and sought advice from insightful mentors throughout the process. After long hours, late nights and extreme dedication to his vision, he filed the paperwork, and Pharm to Tables was born. Pharm to Tables is unique because they recruit and mobilize pharmacy and other professionals to combat widespread hunger. A major challenge that many non-profit organizations faces includes getting people involved. This has been no different for John and Lindsey starting Pharm to Tables. A majority of health professionals enter the field because they want to help people. While most have that beneficent mindset and many non-profits are out there doing amazing work, getting the initial "buy in" from the pharmacy profession and maintaining continued involvement is still an obstacle.

Throughout the implementation of Pharm to Tables, recruiting help is not the only challenge that the organization has faced. Another barrier is getting recurrent donations, whether monetary or food. Many people tend to donate around holidays when giving is emphasized in the community, but these programs are in need of donations year round. Pharm to Tables is trying to organize fundraising events throughout the year to try and encourage everyone to host food drives to help combat this challenge.



Moving Forward

In Wisconsin where the practice of pharmacy is already progressive, Pharm to Tables has the potential to push pharmacy even further and be a pioneer in the community involvement aspect of the profession. Their advice to anyone looking to get involved with a similar endeavor includes believing that one idea can make a difference, surrounding oneself with others who share the same vision, rejecting the fear of failure, and asking questions.

To expand, they are looking for champions throughout the state who practice in both inpatient and outpatient settings to advocate for Pharm to Tables. They are also working to partner with the pharmacy schools in Wisconsin to organize food drives as well as build upon the relationships formed with Froedtert & the Medical College of Wisconsin and PSW. For pharmacists, technicians, and students who would like to get involved, Pharm to

Tables urges people to set up food drives at their respective employment sites and visit their website (www.phamtotables.org) for upcoming events. ●

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