

Upskilling & Reskilling in Pharmacy: Expansion into Innovative Pharmacist Roles

by Jeffrey Clark, PharmD, MS, Olivia Crabtree, PharmD, MBA, Blake Hicks, PharmD, MBA, Aaron Klysen, PharmD, Robert Lolcoma, PharmD, Sarah LeMay, PharmD

The Practice Advancement Leadership Team (PALT) is a group comprised of Health-System Pharmacy Administration and Leadership residents and program directors across Wisconsin. Each year, PALT supports PSW's vision to transform pharmacy practice across Wisconsin. As pharmacy is a rapidly changing and evolving profession, upskilling and reskilling offer important opportunities for members to expand into innovative pharmacy practice areas. "Upskilling" is the process of expanding an existing skillset. "Reskilling" is the process of learning new skills to build competency for a different job or skillset. Interested in expanding your current role? Looking to move into a different position in the future? The following stories showcase several pathways for pharmacists to expand into innovative areas within pharmacy.

Dalton Fabian

Dalton Fabian is a data scientist for Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield. In his role as a data scientist, his main responsibilities include coding, programming, data visualization, and project management. In his current role, Fabian utilizes data to help improve preventative medicine and the financial impact for Wellmark patients.

Fabian first developed a passion for

Below: Dalton Fabian, PharmD



programming while taking computer science classes in high school. As he progressed through his career, Fabian found that many of the skills that he gained while exploring his interests in programming translated to the field of pharmacy. While in pharmacy school, he had the opportunity to shadow a data scientist during his rotation at Unity Point. After his shadowing experience, Fabian felt he had discovered a way to combine his love for data science and pharmacy and that many of his skills as a pharmacist would provide him with a distinct advantage as a data scientist. He also obtained a minor in data analytics while in pharmacy school to help bolster his skills. With these experiences as well as guidance from mentors, Fabian made the decision to pursue a career as a data scientist after graduating from pharmacy school.

Throughout his career, Fabian has encountered several challenges. He said the biggest challenge was the high level of technical proficiency required to be a data scientist. To help improve his proficiency, he attended additional classes and completed a lot of self-learning. When asked what advice he would provide to those seeking to upskill or reskill into a new position, he recommended leaning on mentors for guidance, and building a solid network to help open new opportunities. He also recommends shadowing people who are currently in the career that you would like to pursue and diagramming out the steps needed to obtain your goals in order to streamline the process.

Jim LaTourette

Jim LaTourette is an investigational drug services (IDS) pharmacist at Froedtert & the Medical College of Wisconsin located in Milwaukee, WI. LaTourette's early career involved staffing morning, evening, and overnight shifts in a variety of acute care hospital pharmacy roles. These robust clinical experiences provided LaTourette with the strong foundation to explore



Above: Jim LaTourette, PharmD, DPLA

reskilling in his pharmacy career. Some of the key factors that inspired LaTourette's decision to reskill include his passion for critical thinking, overcoming operational challenges, and seeing process improvement realized. LaTourette's current role as an IDS pharmacist combines his drive for workflow development and quality improvement to support the skills behind study management in his role.

The road to reskilling is not without challenges and learning opportunities. In his current role, LaTourette found that his inexperience in oncology and research practices served as the largest challenge to overcome. The IDS team at Froedtert has been crucial in helping LaTourette understand how to successfully manage the pharmacy operations of investigational medication use. This on-the-job experience was coupled with dedicated time to read literature and learn from his oncology pharmacist peers. Additionally, the informatics team was incredibly supportive in navigating medication record build-outs for investigational medications, as well as treatment plan development consistent with clinical trial protocols. There have been several didactic tools that have assisted LaTourette in his growth. These include:

- Obtaining Collaborative Intitutional

Training Initiative (CITI) certification in Biomedical Research and Good Clinical Practices

- Learning about new oncology regimens
- Understanding how inpatient and outpatient services overlap
- Collaborating with pharmacy informatics teams
- Navigating investigational medication regulation and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval processes
- Leading change in multi-disciplinary workflows

With all of these experiences to draw from, LaTourette has actionable advice to offer pharmacy professionals looking to reskill their own careers. First, take an honest assessment of your strengths and weaknesses. Allowing yourself to be vulnerable and seeking honest feedback can be the first step in taking action to bridge gaps within your knowledge or skillset. Second, be willing to ask for help. Identify the individuals who have the skills you wish to acquire and ask them about their road to obtaining this expertise. Consider establishing a mentorship with these individuals. Third, stay curious and say yes more often. Building new skills comes with opportunity, and the more you can put yourself in those unique experiences, the better. The final key reflection looks at what LaTourette would do differently based on his current knowledge. Residency training has become a significant component of preparing for a career in hospital pharmacy. LaTourette concludes that completion of a pharmacy residency and developing his emotional intelligence at an earlier stage of

Below: Elizabeth Laubach PharmD, BCPS, DABAT



his career would have made success easier to attain.

Liz Laubach

Liz Laubach is an Assistant Professor of Pharmacology and Toxicology at the Concordia University School of Pharmacy (CUWSOP) with a practice site at the Wisconsin Poison Center. Liz also continues working as a hospital pharmacist at Ascension Columbia St. Mary's Hospital - Ozaukee Campus (ACSMO). Prior to joining the faculty at CUWSOP, Laubach held several leadership positions within Ascension, including as a Regional Director of Pharmacy.

During her time as regional director, she thoroughly enjoyed the operational aspects of the role that allowed the implementation of change. Rolling out new initiatives and empowering front-line staff to successfully tackle new operational endeavors brought her tremendous job satisfaction.

One consistent element Liz has relied on in her professional journey is utilizing mentors. When first taking on the role as director, she felt that one of her biggest challenges was inexperience at this level of leadership, given that she was a relatively new leader at the time. To help her navigate this transition, she sought guidance from existing Ascension pharmacy leaders as well as the other non-pharmacy leaders in the organization that she saw as individuals she'd want to emulate. When the opportunity to pursue toxicology became a possibility, she relied on the long-time mentorship of a former professor to help her plan and assess what resources and education would be needed to move this new role.

When asked what advice she would give to those contemplating a career change that requires significant upskilling or reskilling, she recommends seeking mentorship, remaining adaptable and pursuing opportunities that you are passionate about. In addition to your passion bringing an energy and engagement to your work, this also fosters new relationships and opportunities for you in the future.

Steve Rebne

Steve Rebne is a pharmacy technical supervisor in the central pharmacy at UW Health's University Hospital in Madison, WI. With previous experience in business



Above: Steve Rebne,

management, Rebne sought a career change into the world of pharmacy due to friends and family members being in the field. Shortly into his new career, he found the operations aspect of pharmacy to be interesting, and he wanted to apply his prior skills and knowledge base to a new industry. Accordingly, he pursued his new role as a pharmacy technical supervisor.

Rebne feels that the biggest challenges were gaining pharmacy-specific skills, understanding the new operational standards he encountered, and filtering his previous experiences to match the new organizational culture. While he had to completely reskill and refine his repertoire, no additional certifications were required at the time of his transition.

Rebne's advice to individuals looking to upskill in their current career path or reskill entirely is to keep an open mind, be adaptable, and commit oneself to learning and self-improvement. Overall, he has enjoyed the journey along with the challenges and problem-solving aspects he has faced in the process.

Aaron Steffenhagen

Aaron Steffenhagen is a clinical pharmacy manager at UW Health's University Hospital in Madison, WI. He oversees the clinical services and pharmacists across the areas of emergency medicine, critical care, and neurosciences. After 10 years as a clinical pharmacist in the areas he now oversees, Steffenhagen desired to take a leap into a new position with new and challenging experiences where he could be more involved and have larger impacts across the organization.

To make the jump into his new role, he used mentorship and guidance from his assistant director of pharmacy

and successfully refined the skills he needed to navigate his transition into management. One of the biggest challenges for Steffenhagen in this process was the changing relationship dynamics associated with his new role and the reporting structures. Where many individuals were previously his peers, with whom he interacted professionally and socially (some even being his preceptors at one point in time), these people now became his direct reports for whom he was leading performance evaluations. Time helped maintain peer-professional relationships while respecting the reporting structure. Steffenhagen was able to set expectations up front with his team to mitigate these challenges. These issues coincided with Steffenhagen's need for additional human resource (HR) training while upskilling into his new role, which he addressed via organizational learning and development center courses to improve his competence in these areas.

Steffenhagen's advice for anyone looking to upskill or reskill aligns well with what he wishes he would have done differently: Prepare earlier. By performing ongoing self-assessment and enhancing the skills needed for advancement earlier, individuals may transition more easily. Steffenhagen's recommendation to accomplish this is to read early, read often, and learn from others. There are a vast number of resources available, both as published works and advice from others, to help build skills pertaining to staff development, difficult conversations, HR topics, and more. Garnering this knowledge early in one's career allows for refining essential skills for

Below: Aaron Steffenhagen, PharmD, BCPS, FASHP



new roles.

Anna Avera

Anna Avera, an IDS pharmacy technician specialist team lead at Advocate Health, has committed to reskilling and upskilling throughout her career. Avera's career path has been one of longitudinal and incremental change, starting as a technician in a small compounding pharmacy, then working as an inpatient pharmacy technician, lead technician trainer, IDS technician specialist, and now IDS technician team lead. In her current role, Avera coordinates the distribution of drugs for approximately 300 clinical studies across nearly 40 Wisconsin- and Illinois-based clinics.

Avera's first exposure to the IDS team came through her time working as a central pharmacy technician at Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center in Milwaukee, WI, where she had the opportunity to fill in for IDS technicians as needed. The fluidity of the workflow and support demonstrated by the IDS team inspired her to accept an IDS pharmacy technician specialist position at St. Luke's Medical Center when provided the opportunity, where reskilling and upskilling were employed. Avera used her existing knowledge as a lead technician trainer to navigate new learning opportunities and used her strong communication skills for seamless integration into the IDS team. Avera also upskilled in this new position by acquiring time and meeting management skills with the help of organizational calendars. Formal training also helped with this transition, with both on-site and clinic-based learning experiences offered through the healthcare organization. The dedication to reskilling and upskilling demonstrated by Avera has not gone unnoticed and has helped promote her to her current role as IDS pharmacy technician specialist team lead.

From these experiences, Avera's advice to others moving into a position requiring reskilling or upskilling is to be patient, have an open mind, use experts around you, and be willing to work with other personalities. The continued assessment of her skillset, review of baseline knowledge, and careful attention to a purposeful pace of change are themes that Avera will carry with her as she advances in her career.

In summary, as pharmacy is a rapidly evolving profession, upskilling and reskilling



Above: Anna Avera, CPhT

are important opportunities to continue professional development. These examples showcase how pharmacy professionals have leaned into upskilling and reskilling to further both their careers and profession.

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