

Pharmacy Leadership Spotlight: Arthur Schuna

by Katherine F Beach, 2018 PharmD Candidate



In looking towards the future of pharmacy practice, we must not forget to appreciate where we started and the growth pharmacy has experienced over the past 30 years. Recently, pharmacy has been in the spotlight nationwide for its efforts in implementing novel patient care practices to improve access to care and patient outcomes. One area of pharmacy in particular that has flourished in the recent decades, showing much promise for the future of the profession, is ambulatory care. We are fortunate that the model being replicated throughout the country for implementing clinical pharmacy specialists in an ambulatory care setting was established at our very own William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital (VA) in Madison, WI.

The Madison VA has been recognized by USA Today and Pharmacy Practice News, among others, for their efforts in advancing ambulatory care pharmacy practice. They position pharmacists to practice autonomously as prescribers, ensuring appropriate ancillary support to maximize pharmacist time and ability to work at the top of their licensure. Pharmacists are fully integrated as core primary care team members, improving interprofessional patient management, outcomes, and overall increasing access to care.

How did the Madison VA start such a revolutionary program? I believe the better question is who. A collection of passionate health care professionals with a goal and determination for change were instrumental in making this large leap in clinical pharmacy practice. One of those key individuals was Arthur “Art” Schuna. Art retired from his position at the Madison VA in the summer of 2016, however his legacy thrives on.

In 1979, Art was hired by the Associate Chief of Staff for Ambulatory Care to

establish clinical pharmacy practice at the Madison VA. That physician believed in the value of pharmacists serving in a clinical role, and tasked Art with growing those services. Art’s training was in inpatient pharmacy, and he believed he would practice in critical care. The patient care and clinical pharmacy principles he learned during his inpatient residency at UW Hospital were influential to his success in the ambulatory care setting. Art also recognized his mentor, David Zilz, as an individual who played an influential role in his career.

One of the most challenging aspects of Art’s position was the lack of an existing model for pharmacists in an ambulatory care setting. Art commented that the most forward thinking model at the time was with the Indian Health Service’s work in chronic disease state monitoring, but that nothing similar had been trialed in the VA or private sector. Pharmacists weren’t trained at the time to practice in this type of setting: to interview patients and write progress notes, assessing the patient as a whole and managing their disease states longitudinally. Art recognized this gap in education as an opportunity to offer pharmacists specialized training in the form of a residency.

Art developed the ambulatory care residency program at the Madison VA, one of the first accredited ambulatory care residencies in the country, which has grown in size, popularity, and reputation over the years. Art identified his greatest personal achievement as establishing and leading this residency program for 33 years.

Starting a residency program in such an unexplored area of pharmacy practice did not come without unique challenges; lack of support from professional pharmacy organizations, practitioners, and barriers to funding and accreditation were at the forefront. Art reflected, “This was a time where clinical pharmacy was in its infancy”.

Art overcame these unique challenges, starting with one resident and quickly growing the program in the coming years. Presently, the Madison VA has 10 ambulatory care, 1 general practice, 3 psychiatry, and 2 health system pharmacy administration residents.

When asked what the biggest concern facing the pharmacy profession today is, Art replied “the recognition of pharmacists as providers.” The VA is unique in their payer system and being self-insured; for his model of ambulatory care to succeed in the private sector, Art stressed the need for support from professional pharmacy organizations to win legislation designating pharmacists as providers. At the end of the day the most important thing (and what we are advocating for) is an environment that allows patients to receive the best care possible.

Art stated that the best advice he received throughout his career was **“consider the patient first, what’s best for them and how you can achieve that.”** Ambulatory care is a great arena for pharmacists to impact patient care and continuing our growth in that sector is key. Art’s advice to future leaders is that “sometimes it’s better to ask for forgiveness rather than asking for permission”. There are many barriers and much adversity that needs to be overcome for the profession of pharmacy to further advance, but a positive attitude focused on serving patients can help push pharmacists to the front-line of clinical practice. ●

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