

ROSALIND FRANKLIN UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE AND SCIENCE SCHOOL OF PHARMACY STUDENT WRITING CLUB:

Business Member Spotlight: Smith Pharmacy

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A pharmacy made for its people is the type of independent compounding pharmacy that Nic and Nikki Smith wanted to start when they opened Smith's Pharmacy in Little Chute, Wisconsin in 2013. They wanted to fill a particular need in their local community and to provide excellent (and accessible) customer service, while simplifying healthcare and the complexity of its costs. Over the years, the pharmacy has expanded the types of services it offers and is valued in the community that it serves.

Smith Pharmacy's staff of pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and registered nurses have gone through extensive and unique training to fill particular niches. Long-term care staff specialize in care at several local community-based residential facilities (CBRFs), as well as compliance packaging for retail customers. Over-the-counter OTC medication staff specialize in OTC items and have taken special certification courses to assist patients with various cannabidiol (CBD) products. Mail and delivery staff manage daily operations, such as coordinating deliveries based on location

for med sync patients.

Compounding is "the key element that separates our pharmacy from the rest," says owner Nic Smith, PharmD. By offering compounding services, they help to individualize patient care and reduce costs for their patients. Compounding is highly specialized and requires a very specific skill set. Smith Pharmacy has been National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP) compounding-accredited after passing extensive inspections, third-party testing, and quality assurance measures. Compounders attend annual training to

ensure their skills and knowledge are sharp, as well as to stay in the loop with the latest compounding technologies.

Smith Pharmacy employs eight pharmacists, all of whom oversee various aspects of the pharmacy workflow. Smith says that he is very fortunate to have such great pharmacists, each with their own unique skill set. "We try to match these skills with corresponding responsibilities to capitalize on job satisfaction," says Smith.



Right: Smith Pharmacy Staff.

Bottom: Inside Smith Pharmacy in Little Chute, WI



Day to Day Practice

The Smith Pharmacy team starts off their day at 7:30 a.m. with about 20 employees ready to fill prescriptions, prepare mail and deliveries, stock the OTC shelves, prepare vaccinations, and package medications for their long-term care facilities. At 9 a.m., the pharmacy is ready to open its doors and provide care to the community. Smith Pharmacy is home to 45 cross-trained employees, working at a busy pharmacy in a small town, filling about 1,500 scripts a day. Nic Smith explains that diversity of services offered is the key to his pharmacy's success.

In order to keep up with large pharmacy chains, a lot of outside-the-box thinking is necessary. Smith Pharmacy aims to be more personable with their patients, and their goal is to build better relationships with everyone who walks into the pharmacy. The pharmacy is set up in a way where, if a new employee has a quick technical question, answers are available at their fingertips. Smith has created hundreds of internal protocols to keep the pharmacy staff working as a team. The pharmacy has employee meetings every six weeks to encourage feedback and positivity. Smith's approach to hiring technicians is simple: "I believe people skills are the most important aspect for hiring a technician. We can teach someone the way we practice pharmacy, but we cannot teach someone how to be friendly and courteous to others." Smith Pharmacy is willing to take the time to train someone who has these core people skills. The careful selection of team members plays a direct role in improvement of patient care.

Smith routinely collaborates with and presents opportunities to prescribers, in order to find the best ways to meet patients' needs in an affordable way. These opportunities are constantly changing, so Smith strives to stay current on this and to be a trusted resource for prescribers.

Bumps in the Road

A typical challenge for independent pharmacies is to compete with large chains and mail-order pharmacies. When Smith was new to the business, he initially believed he'd launched his pharmacy at the wrong time. At the time, a majority of drugs were in shortage and a lot of their prices skyrocketed. Smith says, "In 2013, I remember losing significant amounts of money on a lot of prescriptions that [had] recently increased in price, such as albuterol,

clobetasol, levothyroxine, lovastatin and much more. I entered the market when these meds were inflated and/or unavailable, and of course the reimbursements lagged significantly with the inflated costs." Thankfully, with a lot of support and help from his family and friends, and countless hours of self-teaching, he was able to come up with ways to navigate these issues and ultimately find ways to become successful.

Smith recalls, "When I started the pharmacy, I could talk pharmacy all day. I knew pharmacy very well. However, I realized very quickly the many things I didn't know. Many things such as HR requirements, payroll, quarterly taxes, etc." Smith purchased QuickBooks online to help with accounting, and then joked that he later found himself doing late night YouTube searches on the definition of a "furniture and fixture." Eventually, his wife quit her nursing job to help with HR needs, and then they hired an accountant/business manager. Smith says that "was the best move our pharmacy has made."

In order to cope with the influx of COVID-19 vaccination needs, Smith Pharmacy rented out an empty suite in their building. All hands were on deck to create this space, to not only abide by COVID-19 protocols, but to create a welcoming space for the community. Friends and family of the Smiths came to paint the space and install carpeting, and, in less than a week, Smith Pharmacy was ready to vaccinate. In order to help with the flow, Smith Pharmacy used Jotform to schedule appointments; timers to help time the 15-minutes after patients were vaccinated; and chairs spaced according to protocol to provide a safe and comfortable environment for patients and pharmacy workers.

In addition, Smith Pharmacy provided vaccines to patients with limited mobility. Patients were asked to park in a certain area of the parking lot, and once they arrived, a staff member was able to meet and vaccinate them right in the parking lot.

During the pandemic, when hand sanitizer was out of stock in stores, Smith Pharmacy came up with the idea to compound their own hand sanitizer. Eventually, they used up all of their isopropyl alcohol supply and still had a large demand. A local politician called Smith and asked if they could help supply polling places with hand sanitizer to ensure people could still vote in-person safely. At first, Smith was hesitant because they were

running out of their supplies for making hand sanitizer and the staff was getting overwhelmed and stressed. The deciding factor was the belief that Smith Pharmacy could troubleshoot. Smith found an alternative formulation for which he could secure supplies, and then offered incentives for staff members to come in on Sunday to make and donate hand sanitizer for the polls and local police/fire departments. This is a prime example of Smith Pharmacy's "can-do" attitude and creativity to find a way to help out its community in a time of crisis.

Smith Pharmacy's most recent update comes in the form of enhanced clinical services—offering biometric monitoring of blood pressure readings, glucose monitoring, and lipid panel result interpretation. Patients are provided with relevant disease state education, optimal medication therapy management services, and comprehensive medication profile reviews that can lead to meaningful outcomes for patients and their caregivers. Helping to provide optimal care, Smith Pharmacy was granted access to Epic, which has helped them to easily communicate with prescribers about mutual patients. In addition to this, a new form of communication between healthcare providers, eCare planning, is championed at Smith Pharmacy. They have been recognized by Community Pharmacy Enhanced Services Network (CPESN)'s Flip-The-Pharmacy initiative as one of the top 25% of all pharmacies to submit eCare plans across the network. In the future, Smith Pharmacy hopes to expand clinical services to include chronic-care management clinics, certified diabetes education sessions, metabolic testing, and acute-care CLIA-waived testing.

Raising the Bar

In only eight years, Smith Pharmacy has grown alongside its community, and has advanced its services. The pharmacy started at 1,500 square feet in 2013. After two expansions, it is now over 10,000 square feet. The growth included adding a drive-through, a long-term care room, a breakroom, and expanding a non-sterile compound lab. Smith is hopeful that he can create an additional sterile compounding lab in the future.

The first few years for the pharmacy were incredibly difficult, with Smith working 100+ hours per week for over three years. It took that time to make a small profit, enabling them to hire additional staff. Smith

says he was fortunate that he was able to make a lot of connections from previous experiences at a chain pharmacy, so he could select his own staff. “This was a huge advantage that allowed my life to come back to normal again,” he says.

Smith Pharmacy is not only a warm and welcoming environment for patients, but Smith likes to make sure his staff members are treated the same way. In order to provide the best care, he believes that treating employees well is absolutely critical. He says that they are fortunate to not have much employee turnover. Smith buys the staff lunch two days a week and gives staff members an array of gift cards as a reward for positive patient feedback or ideas that help advance the pharmacy. The pharmacy pays for clothing orders a few times a year for all staff to upgrade uniforms and to show appreciation for their hard work (while keeping everyone comfortable). Last year, the pharmacy surprised the staff with new shoes for Pharmacy Technician Day. Smith partnered with a local, independent shoe business and had their entire staff go in and get new shoes that were properly fitted. In addition, they try to maintain a fun atmosphere at work. Smith says that

they coordinate various activities, such as fantasy football, March Madness brackets, and Oscar awards predictions, in which they give out prizes to winners and even engrave trophies in the breakroom for bragging rights. The fun atmosphere also extends to customers, who will notice various kinds of music playing and even free Pac-Man video games to play while waiting for prescriptions.

Moving Forward

Smith Pharmacy can be found on social media, and their website is one search away. Smith hopes to eventually be more present online in order to provide services to a larger and more diverse community. Smith’s ultimate goal is to continue operating as a family pharmacy for as long as possible. He feels very fortunate to have a pharmacy in a very loyal area. “Our customers are loyal, we are loyal to them,” he says. Smith emphasizes that he will continue to stay involved in the community as much as possible. For example, he currently coaches three youth sports teams (two softball teams and a basketball team) and was a volunteer weight room instructor for the local high school for almost ten years. The pride he

takes in his community is clear: “When you go to local youth sports tournaments, you will often find a team playing that we sponsor. You don’t see big box stores buying youth jerseys for the kids or donating to local parks. This is one of many examples of how local businesses and local communities have a symbiotic relationship.” If there was one thing that we noted after speaking with Smith, it was that the pharmacy does indeed follow its posted motto in the break room: “Treat every patient that walks through the door like they are your own mother.”

Performing at this high caliber truly sets Smith Pharmacy apart from all others.

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