

2020 Presidential Address

by Melissa Theesfeld, PharmD

Good morning, everyone, and thank you for taking time to tune in to this first-ever “virtual” presidential address. I am honored to be your PSW president and to represent the pharmacists, technicians, and students of our profession across all practice settings in Wisconsin. I have to admit that when Matt Mabie first called me last summer to tell me the results of the PSW presidential election, I was pretty nervous. One of the first thoughts that went through my head was, “What if I trip going up the stairs to the stage to give my speech?!” Luckily, I guess, COVID-19 has solved that problem for me and virtual meetings mean that I don’t have to worry about getting up on a stage right now...I just have to stay put in front of my camera and hope the lighting is okay! The next thought that went through my head was, “What on earth am I going to talk about?!” COVID-19 and all of the other significant events of 2020 have, I guess, also taken care of that for me! The first eight months of 2020 have certainly given us much to talk about, healthcare workers and as a society. It’s almost hard to remember life when we didn’t know what “flatten the curve” and “social distancing” meant. Every aspect of our professional and personal lives has been upended. Virtual teaching and learning for our kids, virtual healthcare visits for our patients, and virtual professional meetings are the new norm in our COVID-19 world. Like all of you, I wish we could be together in person at the Kalahari Resort to learn, network, and socialize in person, like we have for so many years previously. We all know as healthcare providers that it’s the right decision for us to gather virtually right now. But that doesn’t mean it’s an easy pill to swallow.

As the COVID-19 pandemic enveloped the globe, we got used to hearing about the need to “pivot.” And while we are probably all tired of hearing that word by now, it’s a good word to use when you think about our work. When you look up “pivot” in the dictionary, you’ll find that it

means “to turn on or about.” Perhaps that’s a fitting description of what we’ve all experienced in our practices over the last few months. The challenge that I have with the word “pivot” is that it implies a fixed central point that we are just moving around. I picture Ross Gellar from Friends, and basketball players spinning around a court in my mind every time I hear that word! As we begin to consider what a world with COVID-19 looks like, we need to think about how we are going to deliver healthcare and function as healthcare providers in the future. Almost everything we do as pharmacy professionals has just been upended by the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are working completely differently. All of our practices have been transformed. Every day, sometimes every hour, we learn more about the novel coronavirus, its treatment, and its potential long-term effects. And as we learn, we transform our established policies and procedures to incorporate this new information. Tom Johnson even used the word “transform” in his recent ASHP presidential address. “Transform,” in my opinion, is the best description of what we are experiencing in our profession when you consider its definition: “to make a thorough or dramatic change in the form, appearance, or character.” We have new ways of staffing our hospitals and pharmacies, providing medications, and interacting with our patients. We have transformed every aspect of our work to ensure that patients get the care that they



need in the safest manner possible.

When it comes right down to it, the reason many of us entered the profession of pharmacy was to take care of patients. We are some of the most accessible healthcare providers, and patients rely on us for information about their medications, over-the-counter products, their overall health concerns, and sometimes just gossip from around the community. The people that you see here [on the slide] are my friends and family members. All of them, in some way, have been patients in the healthcare system that we all practice in. Some had simple treatments and recovered completely; others have complicated drug regimens or long courses of therapy. These are the people who motivate me to be a good pharmacist and to help other pharmacy professionals have the resources they need to practice at the top of their license. All of them had healthcare providers who impacted them as patients, but who also impacted me, as that patient’s family member and friend. They are my constant reminder that every patient is also a real person who is scared, nervous, and needs an advocate. My husband, Shawn, has been that patient more times than he

PIVOT (VERB)

PIV-OT | PI-VƏT

: to turn on or about

(or I!) would care to acknowledge. From minor broken bones to major accidents and injuries, we have navigated many healthcare systems in southeast Wisconsin. Even for someone trained as a pharmacist who has a pretty good understanding of how healthcare works, advocating for patients and the care that they need is tough and time-consuming. And it's even more challenging in a COVID-19 world when offices are no longer routinely open and telehealth visits on your home computer are what make a patient-provider relationship. The patients that we care for don't all have the understanding and health literacy to be successful in a complicated, acronym-filled healthcare setting. And that's why they need us—the pharmacists and technicians in their communities—to be accessible, trusted resources.

I have met many of you in recent years, but I also know that there are many who don't know me very well. I went to high school in Rhinelander, Wisconsin and am a proud Hodag, although moving to small-town Rhinelander from big-city Atlanta, Georgia certainly had its challenges as a freshman in high school! I chose to go to college at UW-Madison and joined the marching band there. Being a member of the Badger Band transformed my college experience. I remember calling my mom two weeks after she dropped me off in Madison and saying, "Mom...I'm going to Las Vegas this week with the Band!!" Needless to say, she wasn't quite as excited as I was and was far more concerned about the classes I was going to miss. I had no idea what I was really getting into when I joined the Badger Band, but those 300 people quickly became my family as we spent three hours a day together at rehearsal and countless more hours together at Badger sporting events and social gatherings.

Like a few of the other recent PSW presidents, I didn't always know that I wanted to be a pharmacist. And as college graduation time approached, I remember my dad driving all the way down to Madison to take me out for breakfast and figure out what I was planning to do next. Contrary to every piece of advice I have ever given to a student, I had no plan, even though graduation was just weeks away. I ended up taking one of the first

TRANSFORM (VERB)

TRANS-FAWRM

: to make a thorough or dramatic change in the form, appearance, or character

jobs I was offered as a study coordinator at a research lab in Madison. For one of my very first projects, I worked with a pharmacist from a drug company to design a study where we milked rats and evaluated drug concentrations in the milk. First of all, I had no idea you could milk a rat! And—perhaps more importantly—I had no idea that pharmacists could work at a drug company. That interaction opened my eyes to some of the diverse and non-traditional avenues a pharmacy career could take. I worked at the lab for about two years and eventually started pharmacy school back at UW-Madison. Mike Gillard actually hired me for my first ever pharmacy job as a summer intern at Froedtert Hospital in Milwaukee after my second year of pharmacy school. I fell in love with hospital pharmacy—I loved the energy of the hospital, the fast pace we all worked at, and the chance to make a profound impact on patients' lives. After two years of residency at Froedtert and then a few years managing oncology services at the hospital, I took a position at Concordia's School of Pharmacy. At the time, the School of Pharmacy was in its infancy. I was part of the faculty when we were designing the curriculum, writing student learning outcomes for the program, and recruiting sites for our students to do rotations at. As the Director of Experiential Education now for just over 10 years, it has been truly rewarding to work with pharmacists from diverse practice settings all across Wisconsin to make sure that we are training future pharmacists with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that they need to take care of today's patients.

Again, contrary to any advice I've ever given a student, my sustained involvement with PSW didn't start until after my pharmacy schooling and residency were complete. I gave my first PSW

presentation at the Annual Meeting in 2009. Turns out...you should always ask how long they want you to present before you agree to said presentation! That first presentation about new drugs in 2009 had to be 90 minutes long (!), but my time at the meeting really opened my eyes to the Wisconsin pharmacy family—our “pharmily” —that we value so much in our profession in Wisconsin. At that meeting, I met new pharmacists and technicians, and also reconnected with faculty, preceptors, and coworkers that I hadn't seen in some time. From then on, I was hooked.

In my career, I have never known a pharmacy organization in Wisconsin other than the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin. To me, and to many of you, PSW has always been the one and only pharmacy-focused professional organization in Wisconsin. But it actually wasn't until 1998 that PSW was formed. I know that, to some of you, that seems like a REALLY long time ago! Just over 20 years ago, visionary pharmacy leaders in Wisconsin came together to create PSW, with the mission of providing a unified voice, resources, and leadership to advance the pharmacy profession and improve the quality of medication use in Wisconsin.

In 2020, for only the second time in the organization's existence, the PSW Board of Directors was tasked with hiring a new CEO. And we had big shoes to fill! Chris Decker was instrumental in transforming PSW into the premier state pharmacy organization in the country. We miss him, his warm smile, his words of wisdom, and his love for pharmacy. As an organization, however, we have work to do and we needed a leader who could continue advancing the pharmacy profession with passion and enthusiasm. The PSW Board of Directors formed a search committee, and together these groups spent seven

months working tirelessly to craft a forward-thinking job description, recruit and interview candidates, and ultimately select and hire a new CEO. I am thrilled to have Sarah Sorum as our CEO and Executive Vice President! With her years of experience at PSW, Sarah is perfectly positioned to continue advancing the “One Voice, One Vision” mantra of pharmacy in Wisconsin.

This fall, working closely with Sarah and the PSW staff, the Board of Directors and the Foundation Board will embark on a strategic planning process. We will work together to reaffirm PSW’s mission and vision as an organization and make important strategic decisions about the work we will prioritize in the coming years. A pandemic certainly escalates the transformation of an organization, but this strategic planning foundation had already been put in motion by the Board of Directors. Representatives from all different practice settings and projects will be involved in the strategic planning through their engagement with PSW committees, and those conversations are well underway. Additionally, all of you as PSW members are important contributors to this updated strategic plan. Reach out to me, Sarah, or any of the board members to share what is impacting your practice and help us envision the future of pharmacy in Wisconsin.

Pharmacist provider status remains a key strategic initiative for PSW, and 2021 is set to be a big year to transform this work. The Provider Status Core Team has been hard at work for the last two years reviewing other states’ provider status efforts and determining the best direction for Wisconsin pharmacy in the future. In Wisconsin, we are fortunate to have a very broad scope of practice already—pharmacists can perform any patient care service delegated to them by a physician. We don’t need permission to do the work necessary to take care of our patients. What we are missing are the policy and systems changes to be paid for providing those services. Without payment policy for pharmacist-provided care, innovative practice models and services can’t grow or expand. Wisconsin’s plan for pharmacist provider status is focused on ensuring that patients have sustainable

access to pharmacist-provided care by adding pharmacists to the list of covered Medicaid providers. It’s not just important to have adequate reimbursement for a pharmacy, but it’s also important to have reimbursement policy for pharmacists. It’s not enough to just pay buildings or departments; we need to pay pharmacists as healthcare providers. The addition of pharmacists as covered providers would allow pharmacists to bill and receive payment for patient care services under the medical benefit. Billable patient care services could include immunizations, medication injections, point of care testing, chronic disease state management under a collaborative practice agreement, or maybe even COVID-19 testing. I also think it’s important to highlight that the implementation of pharmacist provider status is not going to be identical across Wisconsin. There’s not one “right” way to use pharmacist provider status. But it’s imperative for our profession and for the patients that we take care of that pharmacists attain this recognition as part of the healthcare team. PSW is committed to continued advocacy at the state level and working with our national partners on federal movement of this issue.

The road to provider status in Wisconsin is not an easy path. Many other states have spent years (or even decades!) moving these initiatives forward. The Provider Status Core Team has done remarkable work so far to ensure that our message, as pharmacy professionals in Wisconsin, is clear, consistent, and understandable. I want to give a special thanks to the members of the core team for their dedication to this important initiative: Julie Bartell, Adam Gregg, Nick Olson, Ellina Seckel, Jordan Spillane, and Dimmy Sokhal, and PSW staff members Megan Grant, Erica Martin, Kari Trapskin, and Danielle Womack. That is a powerhouse leadership team! Now, we need all pharmacists, technicians, and students on board to message these four key points:

1. Pharmacists should be equitably paid for providing services, within their scope, that would be traditionally reimbursed for other healthcare providers.
2. As medication costs continue to rise, pharmacists are best positioned to

ensure optimal medication-related outcomes.

3. Pharmacists must be recognized as part of the integrated healthcare team.
4. Provider status will help advance the profession of pharmacy to improve patients’ access to care in the state of Wisconsin.

The next few months will be important in transforming these messages into action. PSW is working with legislators to draft pharmacist provider status legislation and we plan to support the introduction of it when the next legislative session begins in January. We need the help of all of our members to continue sharing these messages within and outside of our profession. PSW has engaged healthcare provider groups, Medicaid, and others to ensure they understand and support our efforts. Pharmacist provider status needs to be front of mind and a point of discussion as you interact with your peers, your colleagues, and your pharmacy learners in the coming months.

Pharmacist provider status isn’t the only transformative work that PSW is doing. Immunization projects continue to be an important part of the public health initiatives that PSW is engaged in. Last year, PSW supported legislation allowing pharmacists to administer any vaccine listed in the current ACIP schedule, without a vaccine protocol or prescription order. This legislation also included provisions for immunizing very young children with prescription orders and reporting to the Wisconsin Immunization Registry. This legislation was signed by the governor last fall and gives patients expanded access to immunizations. PSW’s immunization work also includes significant contributions to the interprofessional Immunization Summit and publications in peer-reviewed journals.

As you may recall from Legislative Day in February, PSW has also been advocating for legislation to reform pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) in order to lower medication costs for patients, increase their access to pharmacist-provided care, and improve transparency and accountability of PBM practices. After months of hearings and meetings and amendments, the PBM bill passed the Wisconsin Assembly.



Above: Presentation slide including images of Melissa and her family from Melissa Theesfeld's Presidential address during the 2020 Virtual PSW Annual Meeting.

moment when everything can change all at once. That description actually feels like where we, as members of PSW, are at right now. Gladwell says, “The world of the Tipping Point is a place where the unexpected becomes expected, where radical change is more than possibility. It is—contrary to all our expectations—a certainty.” Right now, we are at a Tipping Point. Change surrounds us every day. It surrounds our patients every day. And we know— with certainty—that it is going to continue. As PSW members, we are important drivers of the tipping point. Small changes that we make, and small changes that we encourage our patients to make, can transform lives. Big changes can quickly follow from seemingly small events, and all of us have experienced that in the last few months. But what if this tipping point ultimately makes us better pharmacists and technicians? What if we are now so accustomed to change that it becomes less scary? Maybe this is the just the right time for us to embrace the change that we want to see in Wisconsin pharmacy.

PSW members are perfect “connectors”—individuals, Gladwell describes, who know lots of people and have a gift for bringing them together. We

I want to take a few minutes to talk specifically to the students who are watching this address today. Working with pharmacy students is truly my passion and I am privileged to work with them every day. The next few months and years will most certainly look different than what you envisioned when you first thought about attending pharmacy school. Your classrooms, your exams, study groups, social activities, post-grad opportunities, and your jobs have all been significantly transformed. And this change is not easy. But as a profession, we need you. We need your ideas, we need your energy, and we need your enthusiasm. You, too, are important connectors and are vital in the transformation we want to see in Wisconsin pharmacy. You aren’t “just” students in pharmacy school. You are the individuals who have new solutions and who can see new ways to do what we’ve always done. You can speak up when you have an idea and you can embrace new pharmacist and technician roles. Whether in person or virtually, you are going to have amazing learning opportunities during pharmacy school. All of the classes you take, the lab work, and your rotations are opportunities to work with and learn from

about working successfully as a team and managing a team. I was fortunate to be hired at Concordia very early in the School of Pharmacy’s development. Without any formal teaching skills or knowledge of the world of academia, Curt Gielow, Dean Arneson, and Mike Brown hired me. They allowed me to be creative (well—as creative as pharmacists get!) in designing rotations for students, recruiting preceptors, and getting rotations integrated into the rest of the curriculum. My experiential team— Sarah Peppard, Robby Mueller, Emily Bryant, and El Mueller—is top notch and effortlessly cover for me when I’m not able to be on campus. I sincerely appreciate your friendship and your dedication to the work that we do. All of the faculty and staff at Concordia demonstrate a true passion and caring for our students—students who are the next generation of pharmacists that will continue transforming our profession both within and outside Wisconsin.

For the last year, I was fortunate to work with an incredible executive committee. Matt Mabie, Mike Gillard, Ryan Miller and I have known each other for several years with our involvement on the PSW board of directors. We spent most of our time together on Zoom in

recent months, but were able to have some fun along the way, too! These guys aren't afraid to ask tough questions, consider all opinions and options, and make decisions that keep PSW a premier state pharmacy organization. I want to also send a special thank you to Sarah Sorum and the entire PSW staff. This has been a truly remarkable year for all of them, too. They work tirelessly to serve our members, coordinate large-scale projects, and advocate for the profession of pharmacy in Wisconsin. They are always available to answer questions and haven't shied away from any of the challenges they faced this year. Thanks for always having such a positive attitude and huge smiles to share with us!

And last, but certainly not least, I need to thank my family and friends. My parents, Dawn and Fred Martin, are probably watching this from sunny South

Carolina today. They are role models for working hard to accomplish your goals. They are also examples of creating and maintaining strong relationships with your family and friends. My husband Shawn (another Badger Band alum!) and my kids Grant and Kate are also watching today and I want to thank them for their love and support. Shawn has been with me through pharmacy school, residencies, and several job changes. He keeps me grounded, makes sure that we take time to laugh, and fills every day with moments of happiness for our family. I don't think that the kids are quite old enough to truly understand what a pharmacist does. But I hope they see that if you're passionate about what you do, your work can also be filled with fun and friendships. And thank you too to my extended family—Jason and Bridget, Chuck and Donna, and Erica and Andy—

for your unwavering support and guidance.

Whether we pivot to make a quick change, or we transform our profession to meet the needs of our patients safely, all of us must be nimble. In the months and years to come, we will continue to learn and experience the lasting effects of COVID-19 on our patients, our businesses, and our profession. As I close today, I want to reiterate the simple, yet profound, vision of PSW: Together we can inspire each other to advance our profession to enhance the lives of our patients. I am excited to work with all of you in the coming year and to keep our patients at the center of our work. We are the connectors who will transform the future of pharmacy! Thank you!

Melissa Theesfeld is the President of the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin in Madison, WI.

SAVE THE DATE

2021 PSW Annual Meeting

September 16-18, 2021
Hyatt Regency, Green Bay

