

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

Pharmacy Leadership Spotlight: Andrew Wilcox

by Tyler Albright and Samantha Lewiston, 2021 PharmD Candidates

Andrew Wilcox, Chief of Pharmacy at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital (Madison VA), is an integral part of the pharmacy leadership community both in Madison and across the state of Wisconsin. Andrew came to UW-Madison as an undergraduate with a passion for healthcare and a goal of giving something back. At student orientation, Andrew spoke with the UW-Madison School of Pharmacy advisor, Joann Pritchett, and began attending pre-pharmacy club meetings, which grew into a leadership role within the organization. Andrew then applied for and became part of the first Doctor of Pharmacy class at the UW-Madison School of Pharmacy. While in the pharmacy program, he became a decentralized pharmacy technician at UW Hospital and was exposed to different roles within pharmacy. Working with students, residents, and pharmacists opened his eyes to potential pharmacy opportunities and was formative in determining the direction of his future career path. During pharmacotherapy skills lab, Andrew became impressed with the knowledge and scope of practice of the Madison VA residents and decided to pursue a VA residency.

After graduation, Andrew completed a VA residency under Art Schuna and took an ambulatory care pharmacy position at the Rockford VA Primary Care Clinic. It was here that Andrew further developed his clinical knowledge and expanded his interprofessional experiences. He then attended the Leadership Conference held by the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin (PSW) and the Iowa Pharmacists Association. This increased his awareness of the challenges and opportunities of pharmacy practice as a whole, well beyond the primary care niche where he practiced. After reflection, Andrew knew his passion was to become an advocate for the pharmacy profession and be part of solutions to healthcare challenges. After

6 years in Rockford, Andrew became Assistant Chief of Pharmacy at the Madison VA. Three years later, he began his current position as the Chief of Pharmacy.

Development

Andrew credits much of his success to his peers, mentors, and leadership programs. He especially noted that “mentors are critical through your entire journey.” Andrew considers the School of Pharmacy, PSW, UW Health pharmacy staff and VA residents to be early influences on his career. Chris Sorkness and Denise Pigarelli played significant roles during pharmacy school and residency to inspire Andrew and help hone his career pathway. Andrew was quickly and permanently inspired by Chris Decker during his fourth year of pharmacy school on a PSW clerkship rotation to be a difference maker and pharmacy leader.

Art Schuna, Andrew’s Residency Program Director at the Madison VA, had a tremendous impact on his growth. With a “sink or swim” mentality, Andrew was forced to quickly become independent while having the authority to prescribe during his residency. He was pushed to improve clinical, time management, interpersonal, and leadership skills.

Andrew also praises two programs which helped him transform into the leader he is today. First was the PSW Leadership Conference that he attended while working in Rockford. This provided a great experience to see what pharmacy was struggling with on a grand scale and the numerous opportunities for newer pharmacists to engage and step-up as leaders. Then, as Assistant Chief of Pharmacy at the Madison VA, Andrew further developed his technical and soft skills as a manager through the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists Foundation’s Pharmacy Leadership Academy.

Accomplishments

As Pharmacy Chief, Andrew is currently responsible for pharmacy programs spanning the outpatient, ambulatory care and inpatient settings. He currently serves on the Veterans Health Administration Clinical Pharmacy Advisory Board, PSW Practice Advancement Leadership Team and the PSW Health-System Advisory Board. In 2019, Andrew was presented with the PSW’s Pharmacist of the Year Award. This award, presented to an individual who has made significant, influential and sustained contributions to pharmacy practice and patient care, was a crowning achievement for Andrew, as well as an opportunity for him to reflect on and share his personal journey to where he is today. Looking back on his career thus far, Andrew states he never would have imagined this path for himself back in pharmacy school. He is thankful for the self-reflection, mentors and training programs that have helped him achieve these successes.

Future Leadership Directions

Andrew is hopeful for the future of Wisconsin pharmacy leadership while others worry of an impending national shortage of pharmacy leaders. While he acknowledges challenges such as disruptors in retail pharmacy and fewer applicants to pharmacy schools, he believes the investments made by pharmacy schools and the PSW in leadership training and development will pay off. This is especially key given the leadership expectations within Wisconsin pharmacy practice. “Excellence in pharmacy services is a goal and expectation,” Andrew says. “It’s ingrained in the Wisconsin pharmacy culture that leadership is the expectation.” Andrew credits a long line of exemplary pharmacy leaders in Wisconsin who have developed and maintained this standard.

Andrew seeks to mentor the next generation of Wisconsin pharmacy leaders in his role as a Residency Program

Director for the Health-System Pharmacy Administration and Leadership residency at the Madison VA. He states that being in the preceptor role, working with students and residents, and helping learners achieve excellence gives back to the preceptor immensely and aligns with why he got into the pharmacy profession: to help others. Andrew states that he missed such a connection with learners during his time as a clinical pharmacy specialist in Rockford, IL. This drove him to his current role where, as he puts it, *“I can be challenged and pushed, and we have a sheer commitment to the growth and success of each other. You can’t ask for much better than that. It’s tremendous. It’s been something I have been extremely proud of and will continue to invest in.”*

Tyler Albright and Samantha Lewiston are 4th Year Doctor of Pharmacy Candidates at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Pharmacy in Madison, WI.



Above: Andrew Wilcox (right) receiving his Pharmacist of the Year Award from PSW President Mike Gillard (left) at the 2019 PSW Annual Meeting.

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