

Member Spotlights: Cali Felix, PharmD of Advanced Care Pharmacy of Omro and Melanie Engels, PharmD, MBA of Froedtert Pharmacy

by Camille Ortiz Rivera, PharmD, MBA, Tyler Wolosek, PharmD

Pharmacies and Long-Term Care Facilities Collaborate to Vaccinate against COVID-19 and Influenza

Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians helped protect Wisconsinites during the COVID-19 pandemic by administering COVID-19 vaccinations, collecting specimens for point-of-care testing, and managing COVID-19 therapeutics. Pharmacy personnel had to navigate the logistics of creating, implementing, monitoring, and improving these new services in addition to providing their usual services and managing the staffing and burnout challenges created or exacerbated by the pandemic. These challenges led to many pharmacy personnel working more hours than pre-pandemic, volunteering their personal time, and collaborating with new organizations and institutions. All of these actions speak to pharmacists' and pharmacy technicians' dedication to their patients and their communities.

In fall 2021, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services turned to the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin (PSW) with the request to engage pharmacies to organize and lead COVID-19 booster and influenza vaccination clinics at long-term care facilities (LTCFs) that did not have a vaccinator. Many pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and pharmacies responded quickly, taking on the extra responsibilities of hosting a clinic. These responsibilities included ordering vaccine supply, transporting the supply to the LTCFs, administering the vaccinations, completing the necessary documentation, and billing.

To facilitate the process, PSW connected LTCFs that requested assistance finding a vaccinator with a pharmacy that was willing to facilitate the vaccination clinic. Once introduced by PSW, the pharmacy and the LTCF coordinated the vaccination clinic date and number of doses requested. PSW would like to recognize two outstanding

pharmacists and their team members for their successful organization and conduction of LTCF vaccination clinics: Cali Felix, PharmD of Advanced Care Pharmacy of Omro, and Melanie Engels, PharmD, MBA of Froedtert Pharmacy. Below, the authors asked them about their experiences, the challenges they faced, their takeaways, and their advice for others who are considering organizing a vaccination clinic.

What prompted you to step-up to the challenge of organizing a vaccination clinic at a long-term care facility/facilities?

Cali Felix: I recently obtained my board certification in geriatrics because I love working with the older population. Interacting with our patients is one of my favorite parts of being a pharmacist. I knew I would genuinely enjoy this experience, but once PSW started to reach out saying there were so many people unable to find vaccinators, I really felt a duty to do as much as I could to help.

Melanie Engels: There was an unmet need in our community to provide preventative care with immunizations in

a high-risk population... This action ties directly back to our mission of advancing the health of the people of the diverse communities we serve.

Did you or your pharmacy have prior experience organizing vaccination clinics for long-term care facilities?

CF: Yes, as an LTC pharmacy, Advanced Care Pharmacy of Omro regularly provides vaccination clinics to our facility residents, mainly for influenza.

ME: At the previous organization that I worked for, my [roles] included manager of long-term care pharmacy. We provided vaccination clinics for skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, adult foster cares, group homes and the like.

What challenges did you face?

CF: My biggest challenge was the toll it took on my body giving so many shots in one day. You don't think much of it while giving shots, but when I work with this special population, it isn't a simple "Come sit in front of me, and I'll lean over to give this to you." Secondly, the amount of time needed was difficult. Luckily, I

Below: Cali Felix, PharmD (left), and Melanie Engels, PharmD, MBA (right)



have an amazing team that really stepped up while I was out of the pharmacy 2-3 days a week. Many new facilities I went to could not find a local partner, so I sometimes needed to drive 2+ hours one way and tried to combine 2-3 facilities per day to be more efficient. Lastly, of course, all of the paperwork! Consents, vaccine documentation, WIR data entry, [and] billing are all time-consuming tasks that you need to be prepared for.

ME: The most efficient LTC vaccine clinics occurred when residents had designated time slots assigned. This creates a smooth workflow and pace. In other cases, residents showing up at the same time created some complexity with immunizer workflow and maintaining proper social distancing.

What role did PSW play in assisting you with any challenges you experienced?

CF: [PSW] did an outstanding job connecting me with facilities in need, making it a very simple email meet-and-greet, then we could take it from there.

ME: PSW facilitated the initial electronic connection between Froedtert Pharmacy and the long-term care facility. This assisted in ensuring both parties had contact information for each other.

What advice would you give other pharmacists who are considering organizing vaccination clinics for the first time or at a new site?

CF: I take it upon myself to keep the residents comfortable, so that means a lot of kneeling, bending, and hunching. Helping remove layers of clothes, working around walkers [and] wheelchairs, [and] going to the rooms of the bed-bound are all different things you have to be prepared for versus a vaccine clinic for the general public.

ME: Develop a standard tracking tool to use for each facility you are organizing a clinic for; this will help to make sure each step is being tracked and avoid a last minute rush to complete a task. When working with multiple facilities to plan clinics during the same timeframe, it is easy to mix up or forget what each of the facility needs are. Having this centralized tracking tool provides the information clearly and succinctly.

Did any technicians assist with administering vaccines?

ME: We do have pharmacy technicians administering vaccines that have participated in our on-site vaccine clinics.

What are some of your takeaways from your experience?

CF: The gratefulness of the residents and staff for having someone come to them is always the most rewarding.

ME: Advanced planning and strategizing was key to running a smooth clinic. Not all facilities operate under a one-size-fits-all model, so it was important to understand the needs of each individual facility and the clinic model that would best serve their residents and staff. Providing any paperwork ahead of time to allow the facility staff to collect prior to the clinic date keeps the immunizer focused on the resident and providing care and counseling and reduces administrative burden.

Is there anything else you would like to share with us about COVID-19, vaccinations, or the pharmacist's role during the pandemic?

CF: I am glad pharmacists were able to play such a vital role during the pandemic. I know many people, including myself, were incredibly overwhelmed with the workload, but I know doing LTC clinics, and my fellow Omro Pharmacy pharmacists doing numerous vaccination clinics, [we] gained an overwhelming satisfaction in providing care for our community, and in return we got so much support and thank yous from our community.

ME: All of the immunizers were critical to the success of these clinics. A huge thank you to the pharmacists who worked with me on meeting facility schedule needs, arriving to the pharmacy early to collect the supplies for the clinics, transporting the items to the clinics, providing outstanding patient care in administration of the vaccines and education for the staff and residents, and traveling back to the pharmacy at the clinic conclusion to drop off any unused items and file the paperwork.

Our pharmacy team has been absolutely magnificent throughout the pandemic. The team's resiliency to show up ready to take care of patients every day is truly admirable and I am grateful to work with such a marvelous group of individuals. Navigating

uncharted territories and moving forward despite the unknown has allowed us to provide COVID-19 vaccines, COVID-19 self-test kits, and COVID-19 oral antivirals.

Conclusion

The stories of Advanced Care Pharmacy of Omro and Froedtert Pharmacy during the pandemic show us how pharmacy personnel can have a significant impact in our communities. Being prepared, having a plan, preparing for setbacks, and leveraging your team are key to the success of vaccination clinics. Both Cali Felix and Melanie Engels demonstrated incredible leadership skills and fulfilled their duty to serve this high-risk population by collaborating with the LTCFs. They demonstrated selflessness and dedication when battling the pandemic by serving a high-risk population and sharing their stories to improve the outcomes of future vaccine clinics for LTCFs.

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