

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

# Business Member Spotlight: Matt Mabie

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**O**wner of three independent pharmacies serving Wisconsin communities, PSW president and community leader, Matt Mabie has practiced in the independent pharmacy world since 2000. Matt, along with his wife Kristen Mabie, PharmD, recently made the plunge to open their own four locations of Forward Pharmacy that care for the Cottage Grove, Columbus, Deerfield, and McFarland communities. Forward Pharmacy is aptly named and well-known for advancing the practice of pharmacy. Forward Pharmacy keeps their business competitive and dynamic with a unique selection of gift items, women's clothing and other convenience items to attract customers. Patients come for the optimal care they receive, but stay for the experience and the "family" atmosphere fostered within the store.

## Day to Day Practice

After completing his community APPE rotation, Matt developed a passion for independent pharmacy, an environment that felt like a natural fit. In his future, he envisioned himself at a practice site where he could truly foster a profound and rewarding sense of community. This goal became a reality when Forward Pharmacy opened in 2016 with a unique vision to serve the Cottage Grove community where Matt grew up. Like a true entrepreneur, he noticed a niche in his own hometown where his skills could fill the need.

Matt and Kristen now run their three pharmacies as extensions of their own family. Once their children are on the bus to school, Matt and Kristen focus on their next morning project, which usually entails behind the scenes business practices such as paying bills and settling payroll before opening their doors to embrace the patients of the community. The group of pharmacies operates with a total of five pharmacists and half a dozen technicians

who were handpicked based on their ability to place patient needs over their own or over those of the business. Matt confidently explains, "I truly would not hire anyone that I would not be comfortable sending my mom or grandma to." The welcoming environment is what keeps his patients coming back. They prefer the meaningful connections over impersonal mail order pharmacy services that are encroaching on community pharmacy territory.

As owner, Matt takes advantage of the fact that he is at liberty to keep the store open twenty extra minutes to cater to patients who may be rushing to make it before the pharmacy closes. He also devotes time to organizing medication boxes and adjusting dosing regimens in order to tailor services to patient needs. This level of accommodation is a unique aspect of his pharmacy that further fosters feelings of community and being cared for. On days Matt isn't behind the counter, he can be found doing other behind the scenes work such as flu shot billing, delivering patients' medications to their homes or workplaces, or adjusting and personalizing dosing regimens. Matt states, "We're looking out for our patients, many times even before they need the help." He works with his full time pharmacy technicians, as well as the gift shop manager, to create a cohesive environment. Matt describes the environment at Forward Pharmacy as laid back, and addresses the fact that he is less concerned with the journey as long as the destination remains the same: patients who go home satisfied with their experience, along with the medication that is optimal and appropriate for them.

## Raising the Bar

Although the pharmacy is new to the scene, Matt has a plan to implement advancements that will keep his Forward Pharmacy in business long after these first few years. One such innovation is giving injections to patients, such as

long-acting antipsychotics and Vivitrol®. These services offer increased convenience and get more patients in his doors. This new practice both improves convenience and accessibility while optimizing patient adherence, as it is much easier for patients to come into the local pharmacy than it is to make an appointment with a clinic that may need to be scheduled weeks in advance. Providing this service brings challenges along with it, including determining both how to receive reimbursement for these services, as well as how to communicate to other providers that this is a role that pharmacists are confident in and capable of taking on. However, for the time being, Matt is happy to be one of the first with his foot in the door to provide these services for his patients, as he recognizes that taking on new pharmacist roles represents strides towards the future of provider status for pharmacists.

Matt is not just a pharmacist, but also an active community figurehead. He enjoys giving back to his hometown as a den leader and Scoutmaster for the local Boy Scouts troop, donating time for community projects and serving as a volunteer fireman for the last 18 years. Seeing him active around the city demonstrates his dedication to the Cottage Grove area as a whole.

## Bumps in the Road

Matt takes notice of the way in which pharmacy practice has quickly changed and continues to adapt as time goes on. When obstacles arise in the pharmacy, Matt acts as a team player, relying on his co-workers to aid in and contribute to the decision making process. He says he learned years ago that snap-decision making often doesn't create optimal outcomes. Instead, hiring reliable staff who he trusts and can bounce ideas off of, keeps his pharmacies in business for the long-run.

It is harder to implement new ideas than one might think. As the owner of

# forward pharmacy



Above: Forward Pharmacy storefront in Cottage Grove, WI.

several pharmacies with about fifteen total employees, bringing new innovations to life is definitely a team effort. One challenge is finding a way to make his ideas work in practice and also make it profitable. Matt preaches the importance of accessibility for his patients. On days he isn't behind the counter, you can find him delivering pill boxes directly to a customer's door, or even their workplace if that's what they need. It's these additional measures and consideration of the patients which separates Forward pharmacy from other small independent pharmacies. Constant questioning and innovation may require all hands on deck and investment of funds in the beginning, but they frequently pay off with patient satisfaction and profit in the future.

## Moving Forward

In an ideal world Matt would love to see an independent community pharmacy in every town that needs one. Often the choice of pharmacies in smaller towns is

limited, but Matt is a strong proponent of an independent pharmacy option in every community, particularly those on the modest end of the population spectrum. He hopes to see a future in which independent pharmacies not only have more of a presence, but also one in which patients have more of a choice in which pharmacy they utilize, rather than being restricted by their insurance companies.

As a leader in the Wisconsin pharmacy sphere, Matt recognizes that sharing his knowledge and experiences with others advances the profession of pharmacy. His advice for independent community pharmacies is to put fear aside when contemplating new business ideas. Adaptability and persistence are crucial attributes for a career in independent pharmacy, as it may take multiple reworkings of a draft before an idea comes to life. After almost twenty years of independent pharmacy experience, Matt's entrepreneurial spirit inspired him to become his own boss. For aspiring

independent pharmacists looking to do the same, he wants students to know they are not alone. There are many resources at their disposal if they reach out and ask. Independent pharmacy is unique in that it requires business and managerial skills. He also emphasizes that a lack of special training in these skills shouldn't deter students from a career in independent pharmacy. Matt's success has come directly from his education, experiences, and team members he has chosen to surround himself with. He is a strong believer that the money is still there for those who seek a career in independent community pharmacy.

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