

Up Front: Are Associations Essential?

by Sarah Sorum, PharmD

In recent weeks, we've heard the term "essential workers" a great deal. One thing I know for sure is that pharmacists and pharmacy technicians have always been, and continue to be, essential. You are lifelines serving your communities, your patients, populations of patients, and your fellow healthcare team members despite the stress it may bring you and your families.

As I write this, the State of Wisconsin is in its sixth week of a state-declared public health emergency for the coronavirus pandemic. COVID-19 news floods our inboxes and daily video conferences. Nothing is 'business as usual.' Community pharmacies remain open, many curbside or delivery only, to provide essential medications and services to their patients. Health-system pharmacies move from the preparatory phase to the planning phase and in some hospitals the surge phase, weighing the challenges of furloughs due to massive financial losses. These health-systems have developed enhanced policies around drug shortages, personnel, and infection control that are changing daily. Senior care pharmacists face unique challenges as outbreaks hit nursing homes and pharmacists are not allowed inside to perform consulting. Managed care pharmacists and specialty pharmacists have had to adapt procedures and plans in the care of patients and populations of patients. Regardless of practice setting, pharmacist roles are different today than they were only two months ago.

Just as a rise in COVID-19 cases is inevitable, it is also inevitable that pharmacists will be front and center during this public health emergency and global pandemic. Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians are essential members of the healthcare team and essential members of the frontline workforce. YOU, PSW members, are among the healthcare heroes that will rise to take care of our state – one community, one facility, one patient at a time.

While pharmacists and pharmacy technicians are essential, what about the association that represents you? Is an association essential at this moment? What I've seen in the past month has showcased to me, more than my prior 13 years working at PSW, how important advocacy, relevant information sharing, and timely education are to this anxiety-filled time.

PSW staff have compiled a "Captain's Log" of some of our many activities during this time. The generosity of our members

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PSW COVID-19 Activity Snapshot

Many people are keeping journals or photo records of their families' experiences during this unique time. It will be interesting, one year, five years, or more from now to look back at our experience as an organization and as a profession. A snapshot list of some PSW activity during this time is below.

Communications

- Developed comprehensive web page with PSW compiled and developed COVID-19 resources; maintained daily updates
- Conducted pharmacy practice, clinical, and leadership webinars, updating members on practice considerations in the context of COVID-19, therapy, policy/regulatory changes, emergency operations, and workforce challenges and opportunities
- Disseminated guidance from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), USP, Joint Commission, Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) and Department of Safety and Professional Services (DPS), and Federal Drug Administration (FDA)
- Developed and disseminated joint statement relating to hydroxychloroquine with Wisconsin Medical Society
- Developed and disseminated PSW Membership Briefing for Spring 2020; made available to Virtual Educational Conference attendees for CE and to all PSW members through *FastFacts*
- Developed electronic version of May/June issue of *The Journal*
- Fielded many member questions

Care Delivery Support, Regulatory Relief

- Worked with Governor Evers to obtain regulatory relief for pharmacist licensure requirements (enabling out of state and retired pharmacists to seamlessly enter Wisconsin workforce)
- Worked with Wisconsin Pharmacy Examining Board (PEB) to enable mobile pharmacy use in anticipation of surge needs, to adjust Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements for compounding to support PPE conservation, to adjust patient counseling requirements as needed with the professional judgment of the pharmacist, and adjust timeline of licensure renewals and CE requirements



Above: Chalk art outside of the PSW headquarters building in Madison on April 17, 2020. The message around the heart says "Wisconsin Pharmacy Family."

to share with one another, collaborate for change, and challenge with questions has humbled our team. In addition to relevant information and important advocacy in real time, we're doing what associations excel at – strategically planning for the future. Discussing long-term implications of COVID-19 on the pharmacy profession and what the 'next normal' looks like for pharmacists in Wisconsin.

At this exceptional time, we truly have an exceptional team of members and staff, working with our partners in health care. You are working hard to care for your communities – that is clear. We want you to know you are not alone! We are here for you and we are all here for each other.

I am convinced that the work of our association has never been more important than it is right now. We represent members of a profession who are 100% essential, and I have never been more proud to work on behalf of the pharmacy profession. PSW is committed to continuing to do the right things for all of you and we will get through this crisis together.

Keep up your incredible work and keep doing the right things for those you serve. Thank you for all the care you provide.

- Sarah S. Sorum, PharmD
Executive Vice President & CEO

PSW COVID-19 Activity Snapshot - Cont.

- Conducted ongoing regulatory relief conversations with DHS, DSPS, Office of the Commissioner of Insurance (OCI), PEB, Governor's Office, Statewide Emergency Operations Center, and legislature
- Supported pharmacy practice work at Wisconsin's Alternate Care Facility (field hospital) for COVID-19 patients in Milwaukee; this is an effort in coordination with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the State Emergency Operations Center
- Provided a template letter for health-systems to use in requesting medications from the Strategic National Stockpile
- Researched telehealth platforms and best practices to inform PSW membership about options for pharmacist-provided care delivery via telehealth, coordinating pilot to provide community Comprehensive Medication Reviews (CMRs) for the United Way of Dane County program via telehealth and communicating with Wisconsin Pharmacy Quality Collaborative (WPQC) pharmacies across Wisconsin

Care Delivery Support, Reimbursement Considerations

- Stayed in regular communication with DHS/ Medicaid regarding Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) waiver, reimbursement for services, patient care opportunities, and continued to discuss pharmacist provider status with Medicaid
- Supported efforts at the federal level to address gross abuses in direct and indirect remuneration (DIR) fee recoupments by Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs)
- Engaged in dialogue with Community Pharmacy Enhanced Services Network (CPESN) WI pharmacies and other pharmacy providers regarding community pharmacy delivery concerns; continued to share these concerns and CPESN USA and the National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA) communications related to additional delivery fees with Medicaid
- Reviewed opportunities for Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act relief for small businesses and disseminated information developed by NCPA and the Independent Pharmacy Cooperative (IPC) particularly as it relates to forgivable Paycheck Protection Program loans
- Communicated with community partners to reschedule pharmacist-provided CMR events to later in the year

Letter From the Editor

by Amanda Margolis, PharmD, MS, BCACP

When you saw the announcement that the May/June issue was online, you may have thought “I already saw their green issue for this year”. An online issue of *JPSW* was not planned for May/June. For the last 2 years, *The Journal* has run a single green issue in honor of Earth Day. This year, in light of COVID-19, Megan Grant, the Managing Editor of *JPSW*, and myself made the decision to have a second virtual issue. As we have been quarantining our mail and washing hands after opening packages, it felt wrong to add to our readers’ mailboxes.

The conversion to online has also allowed for greater flexibility in *The Journal* publication timeline. We have been able to add recently updated information in several articles that would not have been possible had we tried to keep to the printing deadline. Given everyone is stretched with conversion to telehealth visits, frequent process changes, and online teaching, not to mention managing small children at home, the adjustment to an online issue was an easy decision for us.

We hope everyone is staying safe and has the opportunity to enjoy the nicer weather!



- Amanda Margolis, PharmD, MS, BCACP
Pharmacist Editor of *JPSW*

Left: Amanda Margolis' daughter wearing a hand-sewn protective face covering during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.



PSW COVID-19 Activity Snapshot - Cont.

Care Delivery Support, Point of Care Testing Opportunities

- Reviewed HHS announcement and engaging in conversations with national stakeholders regarding COVID-19 testing by pharmacists
- Promoted training options and point of care testing considerations

Engaging with National Partners

- Kept updated on COVID-related news/webinars from CDC, National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations (NASPA), American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), NCPA, National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS), American Pharmacists Association (APhA), and American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP)

Conference Management

- Transitioned live Wisconsin Pharmacy Residency Conference (WPRC) to live virtual conference; participants could earn up to 12 hours of CE
- Transitioned live Educational Conference to on-demand educational content package, including over 17 hours of CE available for three years
- Clinical toolkits updated and provided to virtual conference participants
- Continued Emerging Leaders Certificate Program virtually, including online webinars and discussion sessions
- Repackaged leadership webinars for all members and students (used as professional development hours); webinars now available for on-demand viewing with CE for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians

Staff and Office Management

- Exceptional times call for exceptional teaming!
- Staff transitioned to fully remote work and the installation of a new Virtual Private Network (VPN) system was completed for improved remote connectivity
- Maintained all existing and ongoing PSW work, continuing our focus of “members are the purpose of our work”
- All stakeholder engagement conducted remotely
- Office cleaning and sanitation procedures reviewed