Vern Peterson's commitment to his community was recognized when he received the 2010 Community CCRx™ PDP Pharmacy of the Year award from Brian Kallach of Universal American.
Committed to the Cause

Peterson Drug and Gifts honored for its commitment to patients and the local community

By Jennifer Bruckart
Photography by Nichole’s Amateur Pictures

“If you ask NCPA member Vern Peterson, RPh, what it takes to be a pharmacy owner, he’ll tell you in one word: commitment.

Or, as Brett Favre would say, “You have to be ALL IN.”

It’s not surprising that Peterson—owner of Peterson Drug and Gifts—would borrow a phrase from the recently retired Minnesota Vikings quarterback. His pharmacy is located in the small farming community of Mountain Lake, Minn., just 100 miles from where the Vikings play in Minneapolis.

The 7,200-square-foot pharmacy Peterson purchased in 1983 is part of the Thrifty White franchise and offers prescriptions as well as medical equipment, supplies, and long-term care services.

It is a commitment to his patients and community that has earned Peterson and his pharmacy a reputation in this small 2,000-person community. That reputation extends to the local 60-bed nursing home for which his pharmacy provides a number of services, including after-hours emergency service 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

“We can call Vern in the middle of the night. He hops out of bed, comes to the store, opens it up and gets us the pills and brings them to us,” says Deb Kremmin, director of nursing at Good Samaritan Society-Mountain Lake.

Providing Model Care

It’s this dedication to his patients that also earned Peterson and his 15-member staff the 2010 Community CCRx“PDP Pharmacy of the Year award. The award, given by
Universal American, the nation’s third largest Medicare Part D plan sponsor* recognizes pharmacies for engaging in a model of care that leverages the strength of the patient-pharmacist relationship to improve members’ health while helping to reduce their health care costs.

“As prescription drug experts, pharmacists are invaluable neighborhood resources, especially for today’s Medicare population,” says John Wardle, president of Universal American’s Medicare Prescription Drug Plan business.

“Beyond filling prescriptions, you’ll find pharmacists in most every community counseling older Americans about managing their prescriptions safely, avoiding drug interactions, and even suggesting generic possibilities that help lower their out-of-pocket cost. They are truly on the front line of health care helping their patients understand and benefit from the medicines prescribed by their doctors.”

Peterson gladly accepts his role as a vital neighborhood resource—especially where money-saving generic opportunities can really make a difference to Mountain Lake’s sizable low-income and elderly population.

“Finding affordable medications for these patients is of the utmost importance. We give our patients what they want and need—effective, affordable drug therapy; he does have help from pharmacy students in the summer while his staff helps with billing.

“MTM is the future for pharmacy,” Peterson says. “I believe that we have the education and training and are best positioned to provide this service. It truly can be the most rewarding part of being a pharmacist.”

Health Care Resource
As a pharmacy owner, Peterson is a local health care resource in the truest sense. He takes pride and satisfaction helping people get the most value from their health care. That pride is evident in everything he does, including his sponsorship of a biweekly health segment on the local radio station. He also began offering immunizations this year, including flu shots and the shingles vaccine.

“A pharmacy in a small community is just as important as it would be having a school or the local hospital or clinic,” Peterson says, explaining that pharmacies are critical members of the local health care team and provide goods and services that would not otherwise be available in a small town.

His pharmacy’s durable medical equipment department, which his brother manages, provides home oxygen medical equipment to the community. Frequently, nursing home residents need walkers and lift chairs if they are discharged home. The store also offers an extensive front-end business that includes cell phones and a garden shop.

Peterson believes pharmacists can make significant contributions to the local business community by supporting and growing local employment, thereby enhancing the quality of life for people who live there. He serves as a member of the Mountain Lake Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and the Economic Development Authority Board, both of which are committed to those same causes.

“No one is more motivated to keep main street viable than a local business owner,” Peterson said.

Peterson was presented the 2010 Community CCRx Pharmacy of the Year award at NCPA’s Multiple Locations Pharmacy Conference in February in Palm Springs, Calif.

Jennifer Bruckart is NCPA’s director of program outreach for Community CCRx and can be reached at jennifer.bruckart@ncpa-net.org. *Source: CMS.gov, January 2011.