



Kristen Hartzell, Nicole Pezzino, and Megan Graver believe the future of independent community pharmacy is rooted in programs such as the NCPA Innovation Center/CPESN® Community Pharmacy Fellowship, sponsored by Good Neighbor Pharmacy.



Changing the face of community pharmacy

Pharmacy fellowship program continues practice transformation

by Jayne Cannon

The name is a mouthful: the NCPA Innovation Center/CPESN® Community Pharmacy Fellowship, sponsored by Good Neighbor Pharmacy. Try saying that quickly three times.

And there's a bit of an identity crisis, too, with that name. When you think about a fellowship, you might think of a lofty academic research project. That definitely does not describe this initiative.

But look up “fellowship” in the dictionary. The first listed definition is:

“noun. Friendly association, especially with people who share one’s interest. A group of people meeting to pursue a share interest or aim. A guild or corporation.”

Now, we’re getting warm.

“Really, it’s a small investment. It’s an investment in my team.”

Kristen Hartzell

The NCPA Innovation Center/CPESN Community Pharmacy Fellowship started in 2020 with a goal of shepherding a group of pharmacists through a 12-month process of practice transformation. A second group started in August 2021, and we’re gearing up for a third group now.

If you’re a practicing pharmacist at an NCPA-member pharmacy, you’re eligible to apply.

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– Nicole Pezzino

WHY WOULD YOU OR YOUR PHARMACY WANT TO PARTICIPATE?

Ask Nicole Pezzino, PharmD. She’s an associate professor of pharmacy practice at Wilkes University in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., and a raving fan of the Community Pharmacy Fellowship. As a pharmacy professor, she’s supervised quite a few residencies over the years, and in her view, the fellowship has a clear advantage.

“It’s almost a no-brainer,” she says. “The fellowship can be individualized, the investment is lower for the pharmacy owner, and the administrative burden of a residency is removed.”

A pharmacy or individual pays \$7,500 to participate in the NCPA/CPESN fellowship program. A residency can cost a pharmacy \$50,000, Nicole says. And because fellows take on projects to enhance special services within the pharmacy, the upfront cost is easily recouped.

Carlie Traylor, NCPA’s director of strategic initiatives and student affairs, is quick to say that unlike academic fellowships, this program is all about practical application.

HOW IT WORKS

Here’s how the program works. Fellows are employed by the pharmacy and are asked to devote at least 12 hours a week to the fellowship. They work through various modules and have virtual discussions with others in the program. Kristen Hartzell, who owns Hartzell’s Pharmacy in Catasauqua, Pa., with her husband, Vince, has a pharmacist on her staff who is currently in the program. Hartzell’s hired Megan Graver in May 2021 to fill a staff vacancy. After she’d been on a board for a few months, Kristen talked to her about the fellowship.

Meg immediately saw it as a great opportunity. She’d been out of school for 10 years, and when she graduated from pharmacy school, she didn’t do a residency. “I just got out and started working, and in some ways, I regretted that I didn’t do a residency. But after you’ve been working for a while, it’s really hard to go back. With the fellowship, I’m getting the advantages and opportunities of a residency while working full time.”

COMPLETELY SOLD

Kristen is a Flip the Pharmacy coach, so she works with pharmacy staffs other than her own. (See sidebar on page 37 for more information on Flip the Pharmacy.) She has seen the cost of having a resident in the pharmacy and notes, as Nicole does, that the paperwork and administration involved with a residency can be overwhelming. For the first year of the Community Pharmacy Fellowship, she says, she adopted a wait-and-see attitude. She liked the idea but wanted to see how it worked. Now, she’s completely sold.

Pharmacies can see an immediate return on the \$7,500 investment, she says. Having a fellow devoted to getting a medication synchronization program operating smoothly is a big plus. For example, she explains, a pharmacy might have a med sync program that has been operating for a while and needs a refresh. Pharmacy has been evolving fast over the past decade and, especially with the pandemic, it’s hard to spare the time for someone to bring the program up to speed. That’s what Meg has been doing the past few months at Hartzell’s. The result is that they signed up more patients and have been able to identify medication issues and improve adherence.





Enrollment underway for 2022-23 fellowship program

The NCPA Innovation Center/CPESN® Community Pharmacy Fellowship, sponsored by Good Neighbor Pharmacy, is an intensive 12-month training program open to all practicing pharmacists working at an NCPA-member pharmacy. A new class of fellows will start in late August. Enrollment for the 2022-2023 class ends July 31. Participating pharmacies can specifically hire a fellow or enroll a current employee in the fellowship. The fellows would participate in regular discussion groups with their co-fellows, along with educational webinars on core topics led by a centralized faculty including luminaries and ACT (Academia-CPESN Transformation) faculty that instruct them how to implement clinical services with a focus on community pharmacy. The tuition for this program is a one-time payment of \$7,500. To learn more go to [ncpa.org/fellowship](https://www.ncpa.org/fellowship).

The core curriculum is divided into three groups:

- Practice transformation
- Management
- Patient care



Graver (above left and below) has worked at Hartzell's Pharmacy since May 2021. When Hartzell approached her about the fellowship, she saw it as a great opportunity.



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– Megan Graver



“Really, it’s a small investment,” Kristen says. “It’s an investment in my team.”

Very often, Kristen says, the fellowship is an opportunity for a mid-career pharmacist to bring their skills to the next level, which improves pharmacy programs and is invigorating for the pharmacist.

NETWORKING BENEFITS

Another great facet of the program is what Carlie calls the “brain trust.” Through the program a pharmacist gets to know peers all over the country. They’re part of a network and support from that network is one of the program’s greatest assets. “A year down the road you might want to start a (diabetes prevention program) in your pharmacy,” she says. “You have other pharmacists all over the country who have done this successfully. You can call or email them and learn from what they’ve done.”

For many in the program, that supportive peer network is what they value most about the fellowship program.

Nicole became a believer when she saw the program in action during the first year. Last spring and summer, she was a self-appointed ambassador for the Community Pharmacy Fellowship, telling owners that this was an opportunity they shouldn’t pass up. She encouraged pharmacy owners to think of innovative projects that they would like to get done and figure out how a fellow could make it happen. “I like to see them think of their long-term goals and how the program could connect with that,” Nicole says. “It might be a med sync program, or (diabetes prevention program), or physician collaboration. There is a way to figure it out, monetize it, and bring back the investment to the pharmacy.”

PASSION PROJECTS

Each fellow completes a “capstone project” through fellowship. Capstones have included improving adherence programs and building a diabetes prevention program, among other things. The fellow and the pharmacy agree on the project and the fellow works on putting the program in place. Usually, the capstone project is what Nicole calls a “passion project,” something that a fellow is excited about and eager to work on. “It invigorates them,” she says. “It’s just great to see someone find the thing that brings them joy. Through this fellowship, they’re reconnecting with their ‘why.’”

That’s why Nicole sees the fellowship as something that will work for any pharmacist. New pharmacist, mid-career, even an owner with years of experience – anyone can benefit, she says. “It really is for everyone,” she says.

Carlie agrees, noting that there is no limit on the number of fellows the program will accept in any year. “We want as many as we can get,” she says. “The more people we have, the more idea-sharing ... that just makes independent pharmacy stronger. “

Meg is halfway through the 2021-2022 program. She enthusiastically recommends the fellowship to everyone she meets.

“It has opened my eyes to so many different avenues,” she says. “I think it’s the way of the future. Our future is in clinical services, taking care of our patients. It’s not just filling anymore.” ■

Jayne Cannon is NCPA director of communications



Flipping the practice model

Flip the Pharmacy is a practice transformation initiative that aims to “flip” community-based pharmacies away from point-in-time, prescription-level care processes and business models to longitudinal and patient-level care processes and business models through the use of hands-on coaching. The initiative focuses on identifying and adopting best practices for workflows that promote delivery of enhanced clinical services. Check out flipthepharmacy.com for more information.



Hartzell, Graver, and Pezzino say the fellowship program promotes innovation, creativity, and collaboration, which they see as the hallmarks of independent community pharmacy.