PHARMACY & COVID-19
While the coronavirus pandemic has literally brought most of the country (and the world) to its knees, independent community pharmacies remain open and on the front lines, dedicated to serving patients’ needs even as they face potential risks to themselves. In NCPA’s daily email newsletter qAM, we asked community pharmacists what steps they were taking to protect themselves, pharmacy staff, and their patients during these most unusual of times.

What they shared demonstrated ingenuity and innovation.

PHARMACISTS STEP UP TO SERVE PATIENTS IN A PANDEMIC

“These stories make me proud as a community pharmacist and it really shows our true colors as a pillar of society,” says NCPA President Brian Caswell, owner of Wolkar Pharmacy in Baxter Springs, Kan., and part owner of three others.

NCPA CEO Douglas Hoey says, “The extraordinary events caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, not surprisingly, have resulted in extraordinary acts of service by pharmacy owners and their pharmacy teams.”

In the following pages, we share some of the stories, photos and social media members provided. They are fascinating and inspiring.
IN THE NEWS

Todd Pendergraft of BA Family Drug in Broken Arrow, Okla., was featured on Fox23 News in Tulsa, Okla., where he talked about how his pharmacy is coping during the pandemic.

Ann Marie Rapone and her staff at The Medicine Shoppe Downtown in New Castle, Pa., were recently featured in a New Castle News story. The pharmacy is making hand sanitizer and is using telemedicine and a virtual doctor to offer flu tests. According to the story, Rapone explained that because the symptoms of the flu and COVID-19 are similar, having a positive flu diagnosis can take some of the uncertainty out of an illness. Those experiencing symptoms can arrange to pick up a take-home flu test, which Rapone emphasized does not test for the coronavirus. Based on flu test results, if the pharmacy’s partnering virtual doctor thinks the patient may have COVID-19, a prescription can be given for further testing.

Chris Antypas, president and COO of Asti’s South Hills Pharmacy in Castle Shannon, Pa., said that KDKA-Pittsburgh did a feature on how his pharmacy has changed its business practices in the wake of coronavirus. No patients are allowed in the store, and the staff delivers prescriptions to patients at curbside, and of course, by home delivery. The staff is also doing vaccinations at the patient’s car.

Carroll Drug Store in Southwest Harbor, Maine, has always offered delivery, but they let local media know they’ve extended their service area to serve patients during the crisis. The result was a story on local TV.

SOCIAL CONNECTING


The staff at Lily’s Pharmacy in John’s Creek, Ga., wanted patients to know that they’re open for business but they miss the personal interactions, so they made a video. “We will ALWAYS be here for OUR community,” owner Jennifer Shannon said. “We may not be able to hug you right now, but we can still take very good care of you and your family!” Lily’s also created a created a song parody video (bit.ly/lilyspharmacy) from the “Friends” theme song.

Jana Bennett of The Medicine Shoppe in Sherman, Texas, posted a video on her store’s Facebook page (bit.ly/myfavpharmacy) to answer questions and explain some of the pharmacy’s changing policies as they help to flatten the curve during this critical health emergency.

“We will ALWAYS be here for OUR community. We may not be able to hug you right now, but we can still take very good care of you and your family!”

We’re here for You!

Stay Calm
Stay Home
Stay Safe
Bennett also says, “We have seen a bit of an increase in traffic at our drive-thru and are asking patients if we can sign for their pick-up (credit card signature, Rx pick-up signature) so that they don’t have to touch our clipboard or pen. Also, we are discouraging patients from getting more than a 30-day supply unless they have already been getting an extended supply of their medications. Why in the world (yep, I’m talking to you Caremark and Humana, who are encouraging this) would we want to encourage people to stress the supply chain even further? We’ve already seen what people will hoard when left to their own judgment! We have to be the voice of reason and the protectors of the supply chain so that we don’t see the same thing in pharmacy that we have seen with toilet paper.”

Dan Bosley of Keeseville Pharmacy in Keeseville, N.Y., wanted to talk directly to his patients about COVID-19 and changes in pharmacy practices. So he made a video and posted it on Facebook. The video received good reaction and many shares (bit.ly/keesevillepharm).

Joe and Whit Moose, owners of Moose Pharmacy locations in North Carolina, posted a Facebook video with advice for customers about pickup, delivery, and flattening the curve.

The Pharmacy at Wellington in Little Rock, Ark., has an update on its website (www.thepharmacyatwellington.com) that it is open, but only for drive-thru and delivery.

LENDING A HAND
Here’s a story to warm your heart: Dan Singh, owner of Dan’s Wellness Pharmacy in Stafford, Va., and his wife, Parminder, were on their way to Costco recently when they came up with an idea. “It’s great that people are sending food to health care workers and first responders. But what about people who’ve lost their jobs in all this?” The Singhs bought supplies and set up a stand outside the pharmacy, offering a simple meal (a hot dog, salad, granola bar, and water) to those in the community who’ve lost jobs. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, Dan said.

Hayat Pharmacy owner and NCPA fourth vice president Hashim Zaibak of Milwaukee donated 3,000 masks and gloves to his community. A local TV station did a news story on it.

Deborah Bowers at Yorkville Pharmacy in York, S.C., says, “No one thinks about just regular patient care during these times and regular emergencies still happen that need blood. We have scheduled to be a site for the bloodmobile to come to the pharmacy to try and help this need.”
Sara Priestle of Hart Pharmacy in Cincinnati reports: “We are doing many more in-store injections due to patients not being able to access their provider’s office. We have two pharmacists who are certified to give most injections. We are seeing an uptick in Depo-Provera shots (as many OB/GYN offices are only taking patients that are high-risk, near-term or for prenatal appointments) and we are doing many more Vivitrol shots. We take care of a few drug treatment facilities that have limited their patient movements, so outpatients are without access to office visits and are required to do telehealth. We have been asked to take over the Vivitrol injections, so patients are not at risk of relapse.”

KEEPING THOSE HANDS CLEAN
Owner Chad Issacs at Stone’s Corner Pharmacy in Joplin, Mo., teamed with area businesses to bring hand sanitizer to first responders and others whose job requires them to be in contact with people. He was interviewed and featured on a local newscast.

Shahida Choudhry at Palms Pharmacy in Tampa, Fla., reports that her pharmacy has been compounding sanitizers and donated sanitizers, alcohol, and aloe to the Tampa Police Department. A detective told Choudhry that, at a crime scene, an officer did not have sanitizer to wipe blood off his hands. “Palms Pharmacy is here to serve our community,” Choudhry said.

Ghada Zuhair Abukuwaik, pharmacist/owner at CureMed Specialty Pharmacy in Clifton, N.J., says that “we believe that it is our duty to support our community, especially those who are working around the clock, to protect us.” To that end, the pharmacy donated 1,000 sets of masks and gloves via a stand set up outside the store. The staff is also modeling wearing masks and physical distancing in the store.

“They believe that it is their duty to support our community, especially those who are working around the clock, to protect us.”
Brittney Johnson of Woodsprings Pharmacy and Home Medical in Jonesboro, Ark., tells us that her staff compounded and donated more than 100 hand sanitizer sprays to the local police department. The staff at Woodsprings encourages other independent pharmacies to do the same. The pharmacy has staff posted outside to take names to expedite the drive-thru process and, inspired by Chick-fil-A, are using walkie-talkies during rush times.

Johnny Meier of PharmaCanna in Wellington, Fla., notes that his store is adding OTCs to medication deliveries. They’re selling mostly Tylenol, alcohol, masks, vitamin B, zinc, and you guessed it – hand sanitizers.
HELPFUL CHECKLISTS
Here are steps David Cunningham says that Mill Street Pharmacy in Bristol, Pa., is taking:
• Setting an alarm every hour to wipe down all surfaces
• Sending out mass calls/texts to patients regarding NEW COVID-19 policies and procedures
• Converting to a closed-door pharmacy. Only allowing curbside pickup or delivery of prescriptions and essential items only, with NO CASH transactions
• Ordering alcohol directly from our liquor control board to compound hand sanitizer.

Here’s what Jay Norberg of A & S Drugs in Pipestone, Minn., is doing:
• Separate phones, pens, pencils, and notepads
• Disinfecting wipes or alcohol spray bottles throughout the store
• Employees are given first option on any sanitizing gels, alcohol, or aloe vera gels that are delivered to the pharmacy.
• More breaks (if possible) to sit down and decompress
• Talk about everything: family, health, small talk to take our minds off things
• Humor between ourselves and our patients to try and keep things “normal”
• Decrease store hours (if possible)

These tips come from Fredi Berkovits at Medical Arts Chemicals and Surgicals in Brooklyn, N.Y.:
• Try to restrict one person per phone or have wipes next to the phone so if different users switch, they can wipe down.
• Limit hoarding to two per person of essential low availability items.
• Limit Lotto as non-essential.
• If very crowded, allow only five people in store at one time.

HELPFUL HINTS
Doug Schultz at Tobin’s Pharmacy of Oconomowoc, Wis., says he just completed a commercial that plays regularly throughout the day on his store’s PA system that states the following: “Due to the coronavirus pandemic, most retailers are drastically cutting operating hours, but we’re trying to keep our store open as long as possible in order to serve our customers and patients. One way you can help reduce our operating expenses is by volunteering to pay with cash. Credit card companies charged Tobin’s over $86,000 in fees last year. By voluntarily paying with cash, you will help us reduce this enormous expense. As always, thank you for being a loyal Tobin’s customer.”

Karen Brossart at Brossart Pharmacy in Cleves, Ohio, says, “Our team of pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, clerks, and delivery drivers have worked tirelessly and with smiles and great attitudes to serve our patients. We have been asking more patients to consider pill packaging and have explained the advantages and thus have moved patients to our pill packaging, increasing adherence and lessening the amount of times they have to visit the pharmacy. It has also helped with our delivery routes. We are doing curbside service and delivery, as well as shopping for our customers for OTC items.”
POINTING THE WAY

Signs, signs, everywhere a sign … **Steve Fettman** of **Davies Drugs** in Canton, Ohio, has added helpful signs and banners for customers to let them know that the store is closed to shoppers, but free delivery and curbside service are available. The signs let customers know that “we would be happy to do your pharmacy shopping for you” and lists phone numbers and store hours.

**Brad White** from **Medicine Center Pharmacies** in Canton, Ohio, says signs have been put up at all stores explaining curbside and drive-thru protocols.

**Cole Sandlin** at **Fred’s Pharmacy** in Hamilton, Ala., erected new signage and set up cones to help his customers navigate the drive-thru at his pharmacy.

**Bill Osborn** of **Osborn Drugs** in Miami, Okla., put up signs to get the message out to his patients about changes in service, plus drive-thru and delivery.

**Reed Hutchins Pharmacy and Compounding** of Heber Springs, Ark., created several signs to help patients navigate the drive-thru.

**Brandon Matthews** at **Palace Drug** of Salem, Ark., says, “We have made 4 feet by 8 feet signs for our customers who pull up to the pharmacy to see we are open and how they can get service while our lobby doors are locked. We are also reminding individuals via Facebook and on the phone that we can deliver OTC items (when in stock) with their prescriptions. The feedback has been very positive at both locations. I hope these ideas help other people. We’re happy to share any templates if people want them.”

**Hilltop Market Pharmacy** in Jonesboro, Ark., is in a supermarket and has no separate entrance, so it is using a sign outside to help their patients navigate.

**DeAnn Mullins** of **Mullins Pharmacy** in Lynn Haven, Fla., created signs and a comprehensive COVID-19 plan and staff worksheets.
“We have closed the store to walk-in customers but are providing medicine for our patients via mailing, delivery, and curbside service.”

**BEING RESOURCEFUL**

**Jack Dunn** at Jasper Drug Store in Jasper, Ga., tells us that he’s hung plastic from the ceiling in front of the cash register to keep patients and staff from touching each other. For added protection he wears a plastic mask and gloves. He noted that staff is calling senior patients and making deliveries. Jasper’s has also contacted all doctors and the local hospitals to let them know about expanded delivery service.

**Jonathan** and **Pam Marquess**, who own 10 pharmacies in Georgia, erected a shield made by one of their employees to protect the pharmacy counter.

**Owner Sazan (Sam) Sylejmani** at Westmont Pharmacy in Westmont, Ill., has rearranged his store to encourage social distancing.

**Michael Spinn** of Bryson City Pharmacy in Bryson City, N.C., hung a shield from the ceiling in front of the prescription counter.

**Bianca Bradshaw** of Elmore Pharmacy in Red Bluff, Calif., tells us: “We have closed the store to walk-in customers but are providing medicine for our patients via mailing, delivery, and curbside service. We turned the gift part of our store into workstations to space out the staff and created a quarantined area to check in and sanitize orders with UV-c lights that are supposed to kill 99 percent of viruses. Our marketing manager handles all the incoming deliveries and makes sure that stock bottles are sterilized before they enter the pharmacy workflow. With diligence, we are trying to be sure that products that come out of pharmacy are as sterile as possible to decrease the risk of exposing patients or staff to the virus.”

**Rick McCoy** at Lopez Island Pharmacy in Lopez Island, Wash., says that he used a service, dialmycalls, to contact every patient who has filled a prescription in the past six months to inform them of changes at the pharmacy related to the coronavirus. “We keep groups of patients for custom messaging and it is very inexpensive,” McCoy says. “We export our patients from our pharmacy system and put them in an Excel spreadsheet, then load them to dialmycalls. Really slick.”

**Suzanne Davenport** at Southern Drug Co. of Blue Ridge, Ga., says it hung clear shower curtains across its register and pharmacy department areas. Also, she says the pharmacy put a two-gallon plastic bag over the iPad at the drive-thru.
Dirk and Trish White at Harry’s Pharmacy in Sitka, Alaska, set up a portable handwashing station in the pharmacy.

SERVICE AT A SAFE DISTANCE

Peter Wolfe at Wolfe's Pharmacy in Chauvin, La., sends this update: “We closed the front door and are using drive-thru. We deliver at no charge 60 to 70 miles away. We package 30-day supply, and do more than 1,000 packs a month. The virus has stopped our marketing, but we are busy and meeting our expenses as of now. Low, low and slow reimbursements and DIR fees are making it a challenge to continue.”

Camille DeVille Boyden at DeVille Pharmacies in Indiana says, “We are seeing patients who want us to check their blood pressure because their doctors are cancelling their appointments. We are doing more deliveries and our stores without drive-thru windows are doing more curbside delivery. It would be nice if we could get gloves, hand sanitizer, alcohol, thermometers, and other needed supplies or at least have some idea as to when these items will be back in stock.”

Brian Caswell, owner of Wolkar Pharmacy in Baxter Springs, Kan., added an additional delivery vehicle to serve patients.

Dean Jolley at Jolley’s Compounding Pharmacy in Salt Lake City reports: “We locked our front door and have patients use the drive-up. We have those who call, give us their credit card and call us when they arrive and if drive up is busy, we run it out to them. Also, I feel like I am working at Wendy’s. I go out my back door and see eight cars lined up to the street. I take their credit cards and ask them to park. Then, help the next person and take them the completed sale. One time I had to go past seven parked cars before I found the right person. Fun!”

Ed Melber at Weatherly Area Community Pharmacy in Weatherly, Pa., says, “We took our bay window and made a walk-up widow and closed off our front door. I moved the register, credit card machine, phone, and iPad signature capture device over there and we have done all dealing with the public with them outside and my aging pharmacy inside, protected as much as possible. We hope it makes a difference and saves lives and trouble. Godspeed to good health!”

Richard Stryker of Bayshore Pharmacy in Atlantic Highlands, N.J., says the staff taped markers from the registers at both of its stores to have patients queuing with distance.