In extraordinary times, extraordinary service from independent pharmacies

The more than 20,000 community pharmacies in the U.S. act as a patient safety net for their communities during normal times and during times of emergencies. Hurricanes Sandy, Michael, and Katrina. Tornadoes. Floods in the South and Midwest. Wildfires in California. Whenever a crisis occurs, community pharmacies are there helping citizens in need. For independent pharmacy owners and their staff, helping their communities during times of need is very personal. These are not only communities in which they work, these communities are their homes, where they live, go to school, worship, and raise their families. For some independent pharmacy owners, these communities are where they take their first and their last breath.

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. NCPA began a feature in our daily newsletter qAM called Members Helping Members, in which pharmacy owners share modifications they have been making in the wake of coronavirus pandemic. The responses have been amazing. Here are just a few:

• More than 3,000 sets of hard-to-find masks and gloves were passed out to citizens in Milwaukee by the pharmacy team members at Hayat Pharmacy, owned by NCPA Fourth Vice President Hashim Zaibak.
• Lily’s Pharmacy in John’s Creek, Ga., posted on Facebook about a science experience (building a volcano!) for kids home from school. They also reached out to their community via Facebook asking kids to create homemade cards to brighten the days of elderly patients who are shut in.
• Scores of pharmacists are compounding the short supply hand sanitizer to fill the public health crisis gap. Many pharmacies have also made hand sanitizer contributions to emergency responders, police and fire departments.

(See page 30 for more stories and photos of members stepping-up to serve patients.)

Not surprisingly, pharmacies have been named essential businesses that can and must stay open while most of the rest of the country has been told to shelter in place in their homes. Brave teams of pharmacists and their staff have reconfigured their pharmacies to promote social distancing and they have ramped up their same-day delivery capability, but they are still at work every day, potentially exposing themselves to the COVID-19.

NCPA is the voice of the community pharmacist and we have been raising our voices especially loud over the last two months telling legislators about the needs of pharmacies to help them do their work, including patient signature log waivers and audit relief, just to name a couple. One of the most important accomplishments that NCPA strongly supported was the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Among its many important provisions, the CARES Act is making hundreds of millions of dollars in forgivable loans to community pharmacies and other small businesses.

NCPA also has tirelessly worked to support our members by synthesizing the avalanche of information that has been released during the national emergency and deciphering the most relevant items to independent pharmacy owners. Thousands of pharmacy owners and their teams have also listened to and watched webinars NCPA has brought to them with experts speaking in plain English about how the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and about the CARES Act impact independent community pharmacies. Visit the Coronavirus Information section of the NCPA website (ncpa.org/coronavirus) for a recording of a webinar detailing the legislation, and other information about COVID-19.

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