

# INDEPENDENT PHARMACY

# SURTHRIVAL

## SERIES™



## Kavanaugh Pharmacy passes the test

by Chris Linville

*In November 2019, NCPA launched the SurThrive series. For the last 11 months America's Pharmacist® has assembled some of the country's top pharmacy experts to share their insights on business, marketing, technology, personnel management, and much more. It's what every independent pharmacist needs to know to survive and thrive in a changing marketplace. Stay tuned for more SurThrive stories in 2021.*

To say that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought challenges for independent pharmacy is an understatement. Among the biggest is doing testing to find out if individuals have been infected or not, which is critical with a virus that has a long incubation period and is often without symptoms.

For **Anne Pace**, PharmD, owner of Kavanaugh Pharmacy in Little Rock, Ark., she saw testing as not only a public health service to the

community, but also as a steady revenue stream. The pharmacy (co-owned by Anne's husband Scott, who is a pharmacist and former CEO of the Arkansas Pharmacists Association) had already been doing point-of-care testing for flu and strep after receiving a CLIA waiver.

"We decided to test the waters and see how our community would react to that," Pace says of the POC testing. "It actually went really well. We had people who were very interested in using the services. So we've done it for two flu seasons, with strep here and there."

After the pandemic hit, the Paces heard about a COVID-19 test (Sofia2 SARS antigen FIA COVID test from Quidel Corp.), which had been authorized by the Food and Drug Administration for emergency use operation in the spring. They reached out to Quidel to figure out the process to start getting the tests. (As an FYI, Pace notes that Quidel required them to sign a three-year exclusivity contract to use only Quidel testing products for the COVID-19 antigen tests.)

Kavanaugh Pharmacy began its testing program on July 8. As with its POC testing, the COVID-19 tests are all cash-based at \$95 per test.

Pace says, "We tell people we will print out a receipt for them, and they can submit to insurance if they want, but honestly everyone has been completely fine with it."

Pace says the price was arrived at by factoring in the cost of the tests and the investment in personal protective equipment, and additional staff to help man the phones. "So yes, it's not a loss leader," she says. "We are certainly making some profit on the testing."

### PROMOTION AND MARKETING

"It turns out we don't have to market at all when you have something like this," Pace says with a smile. "We actually got them in on a Wednesday, and on Wednesday at 10 p.m. my other pharmacist texted me and said we have somebody whose daughter was just sent home from camp and said they needed the staff to be tested; is there any way you could do it? So we did the first test and it basically went gangbusters after that. We did maybe one Facebook post about it. The word of mouth has made it just explode. We have done a lot of news interviews talking about the tests. People know Kavanaugh Pharmacy in our area now."

Pace also points out the convenience factor. She is aware of one

*Safety first is a critical component of Kavanaugh Pharmacy's coronavirus testing program. Pharmacy owner Anne Pace makes sure she is properly attired in PPE from head to toe prior to collecting swabs from patients from their vehicles.*



other clinic doing testing on the other side of town, and another about 20-30 miles away doing it, where she's been told it charges \$300 for the same test. There is also a doctor's office about a mile away and if Kavanaugh is booked up, patients are referred there. "We have a great relationship with the doctors," she says.

The quick turnaround is obviously a hit. "One person I tested said that was the best money she ever spent because she found out in 30 minutes what it was going to take one of the hospitals in the state 7-10 days."

Pace says the pharmacy is not enrolled as an independent clinical laboratory in Medicare Part B, but is in the process of doing so for billing. Kavanaugh does bill Medicare Part B for its flu and pneumonia shots. *(NCPA has information on CLIA waivers and Medicare Part B billing. Email [covid@ncpa.org](mailto:covid@ncpa.org) or visit [www.ncpa.org/coronavirus](http://www.ncpa.org/coronavirus).)*

### THE PROCESS

Pharmacy student Hayley Harrington, who started a rotation at Kavanaugh in July, helped organize the test scheduling. Harrington says that patients are asked to make an appointment on the Kavanaugh web-site ([www.kavanaughrx.com/covid](http://www.kavanaughrx.com/covid)). Sometimes she says patients will call to ask for help in setting up an appointment. The night prior to the next day's tests, a list is printed out to notify staff of the schedule.

"Once the patient arrives, they will call from their car from the parking lot," Harrington says. "We answer and get their payment info over the phone. They stay in their car, they don't come inside at all. The pharmacist (either Pace or Kori Gordon) will go out to the car, swab the patient, and bring it back into the pharmacy."

Each swab is put into a collection test tube, which are named and numbered to avoid mix-ups and help keep them organized.



Pace says the Arkansas Department of Health needs certain reporting information on the tests, so she contacted the department to ask what fields were required. The pharmacy's software system didn't have a built-in form for what was needed, but after a few long nights of work, Scott was able to create a form in its software system (PioneerRx), to output the needed results.

"We are inputting these all as prescriptions, and that is how we can keep them documented," Pace says. "And we can print out the next day's booking calendar and Wix (online calendar) will send us an email each

time that someone books, with all of the information that we want to get from the patient.”

The form is on the Kavanaugh website, which also has a patient questionnaire and a consent form. Additionally when they are tested, all patients are given a Fact Sheet for Patients, as required by the FDA.

“Putting in as a prescription makes it easy to run a report at the end of the day to see how many tests we did, and have all of the information we need for the health department. We submit the date the test was run, the date the sample was collected, and the results.”

Pace says initially tests were being scheduled 15 minutes apart, which really wasn't working.

“That was too long between visits, and we were doing them all day,” she says. “That is not a good idea either. We were wearing ourselves down. Now we are doing about a three-hour block in the afternoon. It's really a good idea to cluster the appointments. We have appointments every five minutes, and people come early – if you tell them 2:30, they come at 2. We run about 5-6 tests at a time. Any more than that and it's taking too long to get the samples all in the reagent tubes in a timely fashion.”

### **SAFETY FIRST**

Pace emphasizes that when doing the testing, safety for her, her staff and her patients is paramount. Before a test, a clerk will confirm by phone that the patient has arrived and ask for a description of the vehicle. Whenever Pace goes out to a vehicle to conduct a test, she wears an N95 mask, a plastic face shield, gown, and gloves. The pharmacy makes sure it has plenty of 70 percent isopropyl alcohol solution

*“People say thank you for what we are doing, for being out there, and spending so much time ... it's a quick and easy process as opposed to waiting four hours at a drive-thru where it might take seven days to get the results.”*



Anne Pace

in stock. The alcohol is kept in spray bottles, which are used frequently to sanitize any PPE or work areas.

A separate work area has been set up in the pharmacy to do the testing. It is where the analyzer machine, swabs, collection tubes, test cartridges, and biohazard containers (for disposal) are kept. Anyone coming into that area must be masked and have gloves on when handling anything. Pace says that typically five swab samples are being tested at once.

“I match the patient numbers every time I take the swab out of the collection tube, put it into the reagent tube and that tube is numbered and the cartridge is numbered as well,” she says. “So there are multiple checks to make sure we aren't mixing up samples.”

Once patients get the nasal swab, they are free to leave. They get a call from the pharmacy with the results, usually within an hour.

“If it's positive it will be a pharmacist who calls, and at that point we can ask if they need any kind of documentation, if they have any additional questions, or if there's anything else they need,” Pace says. “Counseling is a huge part of it. We want to make

sure people are doing the right thing, and if it's a positive test, making sure they know the quarantine recommendations (per CDC guidelines) and how to contact trace.”

### **KEEPING TRACK**

Pace says it's a bit of a balancing act between scheduling tests and making sure enough are in stock. She says that Harrington keeps a spreadsheet of how many test kits they have, and how many appointments they have booked through the week's calendar.

“Every few days we will reevaluate that and see where we are in getting our next shipment of tests,” Pace says. “One of Scott's responsibilities is to constantly be searching for more tests. So whenever we know we are getting low, which happened recently, we closed bookings until we had confirmation that more tests were coming.”

### **HELPING LOCAL BUSINESSES**

Pace knows that being a good community citizen is helping your neighbors. She recalls receiving a call on a Sunday from a local restaurant that had heard about Kavanaugh's testing program, as one of their employees had tested positive. She and Scott met the staff at the

pharmacy and tested about 30 of their employees in a two-hour span.

“They were able to get back and open the restaurant the next day,” Pace says. “Word spread, and those Sunday afternoon calls happened multiple times, or during the day. Sometimes we would stay late to get all of them in. I have a soft spot for those people because every day that they aren’t open is a day they are going to lose a lot of revenue, so we try our best to find slots for those local businesses.”

The pharmacy also allows pre-purchased testing. Of the first 1,500 tests that were done, as many as 300 were pre-purchased and these were held in reserve. (As of late September approximately 3,000 tests had been done.)

“If they have somebody back from vacation or who might have been exposed, they can call us or text us and we’ll get them in same day and get the results,” she says. “They know that even if there is a shortage, we still have a certain amount of tests sitting at our pharmacy for our regular patients.”

### NEW CUSTOMERS

Pace says there have been additional benefits to the pharmacy from the program, with new customers and enhanced business.

“We’ve had multiple people who we found the time to do testing for, and they were so appreciative,” Pace says. “The other day we did tests for a business with 12-15 people, and one said, ‘I’m telling everybody to use this pharmacy.’ They have been

transferring their prescriptions. In the long term I think it’s not only going to help the name of the pharmacy, but also increase the patient base.”

### PHYSICIAN REACTION

Pace says the reaction from physicians has been extremely positive. She says that when Kavanaugh began its testing program, Arkansas required any patients having elective surgery to test negative within 72 hours of their procedure.

“The hospitals and health care providers weren’t able to turn that around that quickly,” Pace says. “We had multiple plastic surgeons contacting us. We had a dermatologist’s office have their staff get tested. We had a pediatrician come in to get tested and he was so appreciative that he asked if it would be okay if he referred people to us. I think our professionalism and the way we have gone about testing is going to carry through when we are doing flu testing and strep testing in the fall and the spring.”

### LONG-RANGE PLANS

As most of us have learned, any plans in a pandemic should be written in pencil, because nobody knows where it is going and when it will end. Pace says that Kavanaugh Pharmacy will continue coronavirus testing as long as tests are available and there is a need for them. Pace is hoping to reach out to physicians to see if the pharmacy can work with them to better serve their needs even when the pandemic is over.

The most rewarding part of the effort is serving the community, Pace says.

“People say thank you for what we are doing, for being out there, and spending so much time,” she says. “It has been exhausting, and we’ve had to learn what works and what doesn’t. But we’ve been able to change on the fly. I’m hoping people can take what we’ve done and what we’ve learned along the way, and the processes we’ve put in place and ideally make it easier for other people. It’s a quick and easy process as opposed to waiting four hours at a drive-thru where it might take seven days to get the results.” ■

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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Research your state’s rules and regulations regarding testing.
- If you sign an agreement with a vendor, be aware of any exclusivity terms.
- Set up policies and procedures for scheduling, testing, accuracy and documentation.
- Be sure to have proper PPE and set up strict protocols for safety and sanitation procedures.
- Limit the tests to a certain window, such as three hours a day.
- During the testing period, schedule breaks to answer any questions and avoid burnout.
- Invest in transport tubes. Kavanaugh receives them through its wholesaler (McKesson).

***Editor’s note:** For more information on Kavanaugh Pharmacy’s COVID-19 testing program, a recording of a webinar with Pace discussing the pharmacy’s program is available on the NCPA coronavirus information page at [www.ncpa.org/coronavirus](http://www.ncpa.org/coronavirus).*