



## Mixing It Up for Pets and Their Owners

by Shantel Houston

The Alexandria Compounding Pharmacy (ACP), located just outside of Washington, D.C., in Alexandria, Va., specializes in compounding medications for humans and companion animals. Pharmacy owners Farzana Kennedy and John Ayele are good friends and they purchased the business in 2005 when it was known as Alexandria Medical Arts Pharmacy, a small retail and compounding pharmacy.

At ACP, they use more than mortars and pestles. Employing similar machines as pharmaceutical companies—including powder hoods and ointment mills—ACP guarantees that its compounds are of extraordinary quality.

With new regulations on compounding, patient access is a primary concern. Kennedy says that there are many more regulations in place for compounding today compared to a few years ago, but she still believes that compounding is worth getting into if you do it the right way. It can be heartbreaking, Kennedy says, to hear negative attitudes toward compounding because of a few bad players in the industry. Nonetheless, she says compounding is a great niche, especially with veterinary compounding where you are part of a pet-friendly community and where third-party payers are not involved.

### LIQUIDS, CAPSULES, CREAMS... AND PET TREATS

Offering targeted compounding services allows ACP to thrive and remain competitive in a time where competition from large pharmacy chains is high. ACP mainly helps patients who cannot get their medications from a “regular” pharmacy; for example, those who require dosage forms that are not commercially available or those with allergies to inactive ingredients. Additionally, patients unable to swallow tablets or capsules can receive liquid formulations of their medications.

**Editor’s Note:** “Profit Pearls” is an occasional series of articles focusing on pharmacies that have successfully used innovation, expanded offerings, and outstanding customer service to become staples of their community.



**Pharmacy owners Farzana Kennedy and John Ayele.**

Veterinary compounding is an integral part of ACP's business, compounding medications to make them suitable for dogs, cats, and other companion animals. ACP prepares medications for pets suffering from varying ailments, from thyroid problems to dermatologic conditions. ACP also offers flavoring—like chicken, beef, or fish—depending on the animal's preference. Yum! How does ACP know which flavors animals prefer? The pharmacy supplies pet owners with free, non-medicated, flavored treats, so they can see which flavors pets like best. Some animals, especially cats, can be very stubborn during the administration process, no matter the flavor. In these cases, the pharmacy can create transdermal medications to be applied to pets' ears. ACP is happy to assist pet owners and veterinarians in any way possible to make caring for animals easier and simpler.

ACP's main focus is its patients—animals and humans alike. Nowadays, pets are considered to be part of the family, and ACP believes this also. Focusing on patient care to solve problems is the goal as ACP aims to be a vital solution in the medical community.

### **VETERINARY PREPARATION**

Kennedy's learning curve for veterinary compounding was steep, but she found many resources to help her learn and expand. She is a fellow at the American College of Apothecaries (ACA), and when Kennedy ventured into compounding, she took advantage of training programs offered by PCCA.

Kennedy regularly attends seminars and stays current on topics related to veterinary compounding. Yelena, a technician on staff at ACP for more than 20 years, has an extensive background in veterinary compounding and is a valuable resource.

### **COMMUNITY PRESENCE**

Kennedy believes that the secret to small business is the relationship with the community, and ACP continuously works to foster that relationship. ACP provides discounts to animal rescue teams in the area to help volunteers care for rescued animals.

Educating the medical community is one of Kennedy's key priorities. She regularly visits with doctors and veterinarians to provide information on compounding. ACP works closely with medical offices because continuity in patient care is important, and helping patients and practitioners achieve that is a wonderful success for a pharmacist. Additionally, visiting dog parks and attending pet events in the community helps Kennedy market her pharmacy directly to animal lovers. Patients are ACP's greatest advocates and word-of-mouth marketing has shown to be helpful for the business.

### **A FAMILY AFFAIR**

As much as Kennedy and Ayele are business owners, they are also parents to their own growing families. As business partners, Kennedy and Ayele are family-oriented, understanding, and accommodating, all of which help to make

ownership enjoyable. Supporting each other in life matters is important, as family is a big part of both of their lives. Being there for one another is crucial to a business partnership.

Kennedy says that ownership is the best way to go because it is extremely satisfying. She warns, however, that although ownership is wonderful, it is a huge time commitment, which may interfere with family life. Kennedy is thankful for her husband because he is understanding and eager to handle important family matters when Kennedy cannot. Having supportive family is key, she says, and although Kennedy is the pharmacist, it truly is a family affair.

### **ADVICE TO FUTURE OWNERS**

Going into business is a huge decision to make because it's not an overnight trip. Kennedy strongly recommends having a strong business plan to support your goals for a successful practice.

For those looking to implement veterinary compounding services, Kennedy's advice is to start basic, understand the market, and speak with veterinarians in the area to see what would lead them to do business with you. Evaluating the business is crucial in determining whether your pharmacy is capable of meeting needs that will be presented. Looking into different resources, such as PCCA, can be very helpful too as there are no shortcuts to a successful compounding pharmacy. Compliance is a large part of daily practice for compounders and it has to start at the very beginning. Owners must be diligent in setting up their compounding services and must be able to guarantee a high quality of service to physicians and veterinarians. ■

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