



# Nature's *Supplement*



## Two pharmacies move beyond the 'pill for every ill' model

by Jennifer L. Bruckart

Josh Rimany, owner of Dilworth Drug and Wellness Center in Charlotte, N.C., sees the future of community pharmacy, and it doesn't revolve around simply dispensing prescriptions. "The days of dispensing alone are virtually over," he says. And for that, the 1998 University of Connecticut pharmacy grad says he's glad. "I don't want to fill 500 scripts a day to pay the bills. That's not my model."

Rimany, who built Dilworth Drug in 2008 from the ground up with wife Jamie, sees a future for pharmacy that more closely resembles the integrative medicine model. "Our philosophy is focused on patients taking control of their health, not the 'pill

for every ill' approach," Rimany explains. "Our staff is trained on complementary and alternative treatments. We align ourselves with like-minded health care professionals and utilize a referral system to introduce other integrative and alternative treatments, such as yoga, meditation, Pilates, naturopaths, and acupuncture." Integrative medicine, which utilizes both conventional and alternative approaches to the healing process, has gained a lot of traction in recent years in part, Rimany believes, because the traditional health care model isn't working for many people. "Chronic diseases, for example, cannot be cured by a medication," Rimany says. "You're essentially just treating the symptoms with another pill."

### FOCUS ON NUTRITION

Rimany's interest in integrative medicine started with his interest in clinical nutrition and nutritional supplements, which he believes have a critical place in every community pharmacy. "Pharmacists are poised to become a provider of clinical nutrition services," Rimany says, emphasizing its emphasis on clinical evidence. "Clinical nutrition is very similar to the pharmaceutical care model, and it offers documented clinical information," he says. "Whenever you're basing your recommendations on clinical information, it means better outcomes for your patients."



*Josh Rimany (center) and his staff at Dilworth Drug and Wellness Center help customers select from an extensive line of complementary and alternative products.*



The dietary supplement market has virtually exploded since the passage of the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994, or DSHEA. Among other things, the law defined a dietary supplement as any product that contains a dietary ingredient intended to supplement the human diet. It generally includes vitamins, minerals, herbs or other botanicals, amino acids or other substances such as enzymes, extracts, or concentrates. In 2011, the Food and Drug Administration estimated there were approximately 55,600 dietary supplement products on the market with more than 1,000 new products being introduced each year.

### **DRUG-NUTRIENT DEPLETION: A MISSED OPPORTUNITY TO EDUCATE**

Supplements play a key role in the human body, Rimany says. “Many common drugs deplete the body of key vitamins and minerals that are essential to good health,” he says. Statins, for example, block the production of CoQ10, an important antioxidant that plays a key role in heart health.

Rimany sees drug-nutrient depletion as a missed opportunity for community pharmacists. “It’s part of our job as medication experts to integrate the depletion aspect into our counseling,” he says, which is why he includes a nutritional recommendation during most point-of-sale counseling sessions. For example, if a patient is picking up metformin, his staff notifies the patient that the pharmacist recommends he/she also take a vitamin B12 supplement. Studies have shown that long-term use of metformin can affect the absorption of this valuable nutrient.

By working with PioneerRx, his point-of-sale vendor, Rimany also hopes to get the drug-nutrient depletion information and nutritional supplement information to print out on a one-page document with the patient’s prescription information. “We’re not just trying to sell them a supplement,” Rimany says. “There’s a lot of clinical data published on drug-nutrient depletions. We’re simply giving patients information about their health and letting them decide.”

### **ALL SUPPLEMENTS ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL**

Unlike drugs, dietary supplements are regulated like foods and don’t have to be formally approved by the FDA for safety or effectiveness before they can be marketed. That’s one of the reasons why Rimany educates his patients about the importance of choosing a high-quality supplement. “Many patients don’t know the difference between the supplements we carry and the ones they can pick up in the grocery store,” he says.

Many independent pharmacies, such as Rimany’s, carry “professional-grade” or “pharmaceutical-grade” supple-

### **Homeopathic Products—New Regulation Ahead?**

Homeopathic medicines have come under recent scrutiny by the Food and Drug Administration. In April, the agency held a hearing and solicited input from the industry to better understand how these products, which make up this \$6.4 billion industry, are being used.

Unlike dietary supplements, homeopathic products are classified as drugs and must have a therapeutic indication for a “self-limiting, self-diagnosable condition” (such as cough, cold, muscle pain, teething, or indigestion, to name several). Under current regulation, prescription homeopathic medicines are exempt from new drug approval requirements, and homeopathic OTC medicines have previously been excluded from the OTC Drug Review. The FDA is currently looking into these policies to determine if current safeguards are adequate.

Subsequently, the Federal Trade Commission, which oversees the advertising of homeopathic products, announced it will hold a public hearing in September to examine how these products are being marketed to the public.

Stay tuned to NCPA for more updates on this issue.

ments, which are only available to purchase from health care professionals. While the FDA does not have a legal or regulatory definition of these terms, manufacturers of these products emphasize the quality of their ingredients (such as non-GMO or gluten-free). Many of these products are also tested by third-party labs to ensure potency and purity and to confirm the manufacturing process complies with good manufacturing practice (GMP) guidelines.

Not all products undergo this voluntary testing. In February, GNC, Walgreens, Wal-Mart, and Target received a cease-and-desist letter from the New York attorney general’s office accusing the retailers of selling adulterated dietary supplements. The products failed to contain advertised ingredients and even contained potential allergens not identified in the ingredients list. Rimany researched several supplement brands before deciding to carry Metagenics, Vinco, and Pure Encapsulations. His decision was largely based on these products’ quality ingredients, testing protocols, and emphasis on outcomes.

Gabe Trahan, NCPA’s senior director of store operations and marketing, emphasizes the importance of believing in the products you carry, especially when it comes to supplements. “Passion for your product is the main ingredient to offering supplements,” he says. “If you do not believe in them 100 percent, then you will indeed fail.” For more tips on

## Natural Medicine Resources

American Botanical Council ([www.herbalgram.org](http://www.herbalgram.org))  
American Herbalists Guild ([www.americanherbalistsguild.com](http://www.americanherbalistsguild.com))  
Pharmacist's Letter—Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database ([www.pharmacistsletter.com](http://www.pharmacistsletter.com))  
The Townsend Letter ([www.townsendletter.com](http://www.townsendletter.com))  
PubMed ([www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed))  
Clinical Journal of Integrative Medicine ([www.imjournal.com](http://www.imjournal.com))  
Medicines from the Earth ([www.botanicalmedicine.org](http://www.botanicalmedicine.org))

selecting and marketing nutritional supplements, be sure to check out Gabe's column this month (page 56) and read his "Six Steps to Success for Merchandising Vitamins" tip sheet available on the NCPA website at [www.ncpanet.org/feo](http://www.ncpanet.org/feo).

Rimany admits that pharmacists receive limited training in the area of nutrition and supplements, which is one reason why he's currently pursuing a certified clinical nutritionist (CCN) designation. He recommends this certification for pharmacists who already have a health care background but want more clinical know-how about nutrition. He's also become one of only a handful of pharmacists nationwide to become a Pharmacist Health Coach certified in FirstLine Therapy®, a lifestyle modification program offered by Metagenics. The program focuses on healthy nutrition, nutritional protocols, exercise and stress management, and it gives Rimany the tools to help patients reach their wellness goals. "Patients who value a proactive approach to their health want this information," he says. "They appreciate these are all avenues to better overall health."

### PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

Rimany says pharmacy has yet to define its role in the integrative model. "Unfortunately, if you sit down and Google 'integrative pharmacy,' there isn't a lot written about it," he says. "No one has put it all together on the pharmaceutical side."

Rimany intends to change that and says his goal is to take his learnings from pharmacy school and his additional learnings about supplements, lifestyle modification, exercise, and wellness to create his own definition of what it means to be an integrative pharmacy and how it fits into today's health care model.

"Patients are looking for an alternative approach to health care. Many recognize the value of prevention and the importance of overall wellness," he says. "They realize that if we make the right lifestyle changes in our 30s and 40s, life looks a lot better in our 60s and 70s." ■

# Nature's Healing Powers



If first impressions are anything, the garden in front of Mac's Medicine Mart in Kingsport, Tenn., tells you that this is not your traditional pharmacy. Even the casual passerby can't walk by without admiring this tribute to nature. "The garden is quite a topic of conversation in town," admits Barry Walton, RPh, co-owner of the pharmacy, which was founded in 1989 by Phillip and Barbara McManus, both 1961 graduates of Samford University's McWhorter School of Pharmacy. The garden started as a tribute to Phillip's roots. His brother sent him some cotton seeds from his home state of Alabama, and on a whim, Phillip planted them. The cotton took to the Tennessee soil and has been a fixture in the garden ever since.

Phillip believed that nature had an important role to play inside his pharmacy as well, and he made the decision early on to incorporate natural and alternative medicine into the pharmacy's offerings. McManus himself had suffered from chronic sinus issues that did not respond to conventional medicine. He found relief in alternative medicine, and the idea of helping others achieve relief through more natural means became his mission. "When Phillip focuses on an idea, he doesn't stop until it is resolved, one way or another," explains Walton. The pharmacy led the



way in natural sinus irrigation techniques. It expanded into mold testing and sprays among other natural remedies. It currently carries essential oils, tinctures, and has even dabbled in raw herbs. Phillip's wife Barbara took a little more convincing. "She still laughs about calling it voodoo, which is so funny now, because she has become such a believer in it!"

Walton, a 1988 Samford graduate, approached the couple in 2005 about buying the pharmacy from them after realizing he was ready for pharmacy ownership. "I went over to their house that night, and we drew up the original contract on a napkin," Walton recounts. A year later, Walton bought out Barbara's portion of the business. He and Phillip remain co-owners.

### **EXPANDING INTO THE GROCERY BUSINESS**

While the decision to offer natural medicines was easy, the implementation was a bit more challenging. Walton admits there were mistakes made early in the process. "We ordered vitamin displays without doing the proper research. We had pharmacists spreading themselves too thin by trying to run the pharmacy and the supplement section," he says.

### ***Mac's Medicine Mart in Tennessee is rooted in a nature-focused philosophy in pharmacy and food.***

McManus rectified one of those early mistakes by doing something uncommon in the pharmacy world. In 2002, McManus bought Good Food Grocery, a local health food store that specialized in natural foods (non-GMO, gluten-free), and brought it under the roof of Mac's. The acquisition allowed the grocery store to more than double in size and add a broader offering of natural food items and larger selection of herbs and supplements. By retaining all of the grocery's employees, Mac's also was able to preserve the significant knowledge base and expertise of the staff, many of whom had backgrounds in herbs and natural supplements. That knowledge was supplemented by sending the pharmacy staff to natural pharmacy conferences, including Natural Products Expo, American Herbalist Guild Conference, and Medicines from the Earth. McManus and Walton also bring trainers into the pharmacy to educate employees about herbal supplements.

The decision to expand into natural foods has proven to be a good move for the pharmacy. Walton estimates 10-15 per-

cent of the pharmacy's total sales comes from the grocery side, and there have been tangential benefits too. "We've been able to convert a number of Good Food Grocery customers to pharmacy patients," he says, explaining that many grocery customers would come in asking if there is something 'natural' to treat their health condition.

"That gives us the perfect opportunity to have a more in-depth conversation with them about their health and other medications they are taking," Walton explains. "After sitting down with them, they often become our pharmacy patients."

### **BALANCING NATURE AND SCIENCE**

Walton emphasizes the decision to add botanical medicine and nutritional supplements to a pharmacy's product mix is both about patient care and the bottom line. "There are people in this world who will not take supplements," Walton says. "Likewise, there are people in this world who won't take or can't afford pharmaceuticals. By diversifying your product mix, all of your eggs are not in one basket."

Walton admits that the decision to offer both alternative and traditional medicine products can put the pharmacy a bit at odds with itself. Proponents of natural healing techniques tend to be leery of pharmaceutical products, he explains, and vice versa. "We struggled a bit with that in the beginning," Walton says. "We overcame it by embracing alternative medicine as an 'add-on-rather-than an either-or' decision. It's really about whatever works for the patient."

### **BECOMING A VALUED RESOURCE**

This focus on the patient and respecting his/her value system is a key part of the integrative medicine model and highly embraced by local Kingsport physician and Mac's Medicine Mart ally Reid Blackwelder, MD. In his family medicine practice, Blackwelder advocates both traditional and alternative healing techniques and frequently sends patients to Mac's Medicine Mart to benefit from the staff's expertise in herbs and non-traditional remedies.

Blackwelder also serves as a professor and director of medical education for East Tennessee State University's residency program in Kingsport. As part of his residents' training, Blackwelder sends them to Mac's Medicine Mart to watch the herbal consultations and learn more about drug-induced nutrient depletion and drug-herb interactions. "They see us as a resource, and that's what we want them to do," says Walton.

These days, the phones at Mac's Medicine Mart are busy with calls from local physicians seeking assistance with supplements and botanical medicine. "We have medical professionals call us every day to get recommendations or information



***Mac's garden started with Alabama cotton and has grown into a local conversation piece.***

on items and what doses are recommended." Walton admits this interest didn't happen overnight. "There was initial resistance early on," he says. "But as we proved ourselves and doctors saw patients benefiting from some of the things we were doing, it didn't take long for word to get out."

One of those areas was wound care. Walton explains that the pharmacy developed an innovative wound care product that utilized a mushroom by-product. It was effective and sped up patients' healing times significantly. "Of course when you do that, it gets the attention of the doctors," he says.

In 2014, Mac's Medicine Mart broke ground on a new 15,000-square-foot building on a neighboring lot. The new two-story structure will more than double the pharmacy's current size and better organize its businesses, which include a durable medical equipment company, grocery, and the pharmacy. Scheduled to open this fall, the new pharmacy will include a drive-thru, second-story offices, and a classroom, along with private consultation rooms. And, of course, the garden. ■

**Jennifer L. Bruckart is a former NCPA staff member and is currently the director of outreach and education for WeCare Pharmacy in Warrenton, Va.**