



*Scott Weper, RPh, owner of  
the Compounding Shoppe.*



# PROBLEM SOLVER

By Chris Linville

With a multi-faceted approach, compounding pharmacist Scott Wepfer helps improve patient health

Considering that his grandfather and father were both pharmacists, it's no surprise that Scott Wepfer, RPh, followed the same path. And when you have a family member who's been down that road and is available to lend advice, it comes in handy.

As a kid working for his father in central Wisconsin, and later after he became a pharmacist, Wepfer took note of the lack of compounding options available within pharmacies. Wepfer's father saw his son's interest, and suggested that he open his own compounding pharmacy.

And Wepfer, who had been working at a Wal-Mart pharmacy, took him up on it. "I invested my \$20,000 in Wal-Mart stock that I had accrued over the previous four years, and two weeks after my third child was born we opened up the first compounding-only pharmacy from scratch in America," Wepfer says.

That was 13 years ago. Today the Compounding Shoppe is a successful and respected business based in Birmingham, Alabama. But in 1995, with 400 square feet and no employees, Wepfer wasn't so sure.

"They say there's a fine line between faith and



◀ Scott Wepfer with his staff of pharmacists and technicians.

foolishness,” he says with a laugh. “So on that day I didn’t know which side of the line I was on.”

Now the pharmacy is 3,400 square feet, with four pharmacists (including Wepfer), seven technicians, and a marketing director. The pharmacy has two private consultation areas, an “herb” room that Wepfer says can be used as a counseling room, a dispensing laboratory, and a compounding area with main, hazard, wet, and sterile laboratories.

Wepfer is particularly proud of his waiting area, which covers almost 500 square feet. Prior to earning his pharmacy degree at the University of Wisconsin, he had done a two-year stint in the U.S. Army. While there, he worked in a drug and alcohol facility which he says had a less than comforting set up.

“Our waiting room was not very nice to look at,” Wepfer says. “I thought, geez, these guys are coming up here, their self esteem is already low and they’ve got to sit in this crappy-looking room. How can they possibly start to feel better sitting in a room like this?”

“My intent was that healing would start in the waiting room. It’s nice looking, it’s Feng Shui balanced, so there’s good energy.”

## Wellness Model

As part of the healing process, Wepfer has incorporated a wellness model to patient care, taking a holistic and integrative approach in consultations with patients.

“My background is from my dad,” he says. “I tell people I’m a third generation pharmacist and a second generation naturopathic pharmacist, for lack of a better term, and people seem to get it when you say that. Since I first opened up our tag line has always been ‘Your problem-solving pharmacy.’ As time went on, we began to be challenged by doctors and patients to solve problems that we couldn’t solve just with compounding.”

In an effort to find innovative ways of assisting patients, Wepfer says he sought out continuing educa-

tion opportunities in areas such as homeopathy and herbal medicine. As part of that strategy, he learned about Standard Process, a company that provides “whole foods” and dietary supplements. Wepfer says the company primarily distributes its products through chiropractic offices.

“With SP, it’s opened a lot of doors, and allowed us to help solve problems that we couldn’t solve with other companies’ products,” he says. “Along with compounding, getting involved with SP is probably the biggest professional blessing that we’ve had to date.”

With his multi-faceted approach, Wepfer says, “Compounding is one of the tools we use to help solve people’s problems. But it’s not the only tool.”

## Problem Solving

Wepfer says two of his primary areas of clinical expertise are hormone replacement therapy and pain management. The third, he says, is problem solving.

“I’ll have people come in and I’ve never heard of their problem,” Wepfer says. “So we’ll look it up, we’ll research it, and come up with a rational therapy plan for them. It’s nice as a pharmacist when they come in and they’re on a list of drugs from their doctors—we’re experts in that, so I think pharmacy is the best base work in the area of alternative medicine of all the professions that are out there.

“So we can take that concept of a rational therapy plan, and expand it from just basing it on prescription drugs, to maybe including a homeopathic or whole food nutritional, or an herbal. Or it might be a compounded medication that’s no longer commercially available. It just depends on whatever is best for the patient.”

Wepfer describes a female patient who was referred to him by a psychiatrist for severe drug-resistant depression. After 14 days on a therapy plan designed by the Compounding Shoppe, Wepfer says she reported no depression.

“To me that suggested that her depression wasn’t in her head, but rather it was a symptom of something else,” he says. “I think her depression was a probably a symptom of her hormone imbalance and candida.”

Her treatment encompassed homeopathics, whole food nutritional products, and compounded progesterone. Wepfer says, “That was a really good example



of taking not only an integrative approach, but also a holistic approach. We didn't just look at her as a depression case, we looked at her whole system, and that's where these other underlying root problems came from."

Wepfer says the lack of focus in seeking causes of health issues is somewhat puzzling to him.

"I think too much today, medicine focuses on the 'branches,' which I liken to being the symptoms," he says. "The problem is that we treat the symptoms and not the root problem. That root is still present and it's creating additional symptoms. We see patients come in with six different problems, but they all have the same root cause."

## Technical Support

Wepfer's enthusiasm for seeking out innovative options for patient care is matched by his open-minded attitude about technology. In fact, without it, his business may have been grounded early.

When the pharmacy opened, Wepfer says he used voice mail with his phone system, and also acquired a pager and set it up so that any time he received a message at the store, it would page him, and then he would use his cell phone to call voice mail.

"So on my first day of being open, I wasn't at the pharmacy at all," Wepfer says. "I was out marketing to the doctors. And on my third day I got my first prescription. So I stopped marketing for the day, and went in and compounded that prescription, and that's how I kept going. There was a lot of back and forth."

Wepfer acknowledges that the technology may seem redundant now, but in 1995, "It was all that we had—voice mail, a pager, and a cell phone. Now you could have it forwarded to your cell phone, but back then you didn't have that kind of technology."

Wepfer certainly isn't stuck in the past regarding his current automation capabilities. A motivating factor to keep his technology current is his Pharmacy Compounding Accreditation Board (PCAB) accreditation, which his pharmacy acquired in September 2006. It and the Arizona-based Apothecary Shops, owned by John D. Musil, PharmD, were the first U.S. pharmacies to be accredited.

"Most of the process was spent in writing policies and procedures," Wepfer says. "It was time consuming and not much fun, but at the same time it makes you a better compounding pharmacy, primarily because it forces you to develop better systems."

*Scanning technology is one aspect of the Compounding Shoppe's automation investment.*

And those systems include his software from PK Software, Inc. "The number one way it works is to force us to comply with our policies and procedures—I call it 'forced compliance,'" he says.

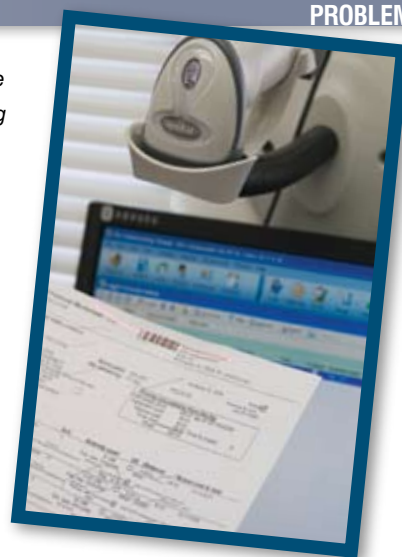
"Probably the most challenging thing you have to do once you write your policies is to following them on a daily basis over and over again."

Wepfer says his pharmacy technology allows him to bar code all of its incoming chemicals when they are entered into the inventory. Also, all of its formulas are written in the pharmacy software system, which allows staff to bypass paper by calling up an electronic log worksheet. The worksheet tells the compounding staffer what ingredients are needed, and as each ingredient is weighed, the bar code is scanned to verify that the correct chemical is being used. When it is weighed, the balance is integrated into the pharmacy system, so when the print button is pressed, it is sent electronically to the log worksheet.

"It's also set up so that the chief pharmacist can program whatever parameters they want," Wepfer says. "So I, as the chief pharmacist, set those parameters to be plus or minus three percent of what it's actually supposed to be. And when you get down to weighing 40 milligrams, it's a pretty tough thing to do. If you're outside of that, the system won't let you go forward. And if we back up to the beginning of the day, the system is set up to require them to calibrate each balance before they can use them to weigh something. It gives them a message if they haven't done the calibration."

Wepfer says that although the concept of "forced compliance" may have a less than positive connotation, it's actually worked well at the pharmacy.

"Everybody likes it," he says. "Because we know at the end of the day that everything was made correctly. Working with the software and integrating everything together has really created an error-free compounding lab."





◀ Sarah Boyington, PharmD, listens to messages on the IVR system

Wepfer also says that the software integrates with the pharmacy's IVR system, and also with its QuickBooks accounting software. Integration with the store's QuickBooks point of sale is also in the works. "I'm really excited about that," he says. "That will really kind of finish off the integration we're looking for internally."

A new feature for the pharmacy is a scheduling program (the "To-Do" system). "We can now click on it and schedule our counsels within the system," Wepfer says. "We keep our consultation notes electronically. When a patient comes in, he or she fills out a questionnaire, and we scan it and have it linked to that patient's profile."

Sixteen computers are linked within the pharmacy, creating almost full automation. "The more automated things are, the better the experience is with our patients when they interact with us, whether that's on the phone, or in person here at the pharmacy," Wepfer says. "I think the more we're able to integrate the technology, the more holistic experience we'll be able to offer our patients."

## Business Philosophies

As a pharmacist, Wepfer needs to focus on patient health. As a pharmacy owner, he needs to focus on maintaining financial health, and he gives the business side more than a glancing look. Finding ways to stay competitive and gain an edge are important to Wepfer, and he considers himself a student of business gurus such as Seth Godin, Michael Gerber, and the late W. Edwards Deming.

Wepfer cites a passage from Godin's best-selling book "The Dip," that he has applied to his pharmacy. "He says that if you are looking to start a business, find one that has a big dip in it, that has some big challenge involved with it," Wepfer says. "He encourages you to push through that challenge, to just get it done and pop out on the other end. I think within compounding pharmacy, that challenge is accreditation. When you make it through the dip, you make yourself scarcer. That increases your value."

In Wepfer's view, applying his skills and the phar-

macy's services to add value and worth to the business is a no-brainer. "If I look at my educational background, I've got a degree in pharmacy, but as a pharmacy owner I'm also supposed to be a good businessman and a good marketing person," he says. "I've had to broaden my continuing education, and not just in pharmacy, but in areas like integrative medicine and in business."

Wepfer also gives credit to NCPA in sharpening his business acumen by attending its Profit Mastery seminar ([www.ncpanet.org/ownership/profitmastery](http://www.ncpanet.org/ownership/profitmastery)).

"Wow, I felt like I had received a Harvard MBA in a weekend," he says. "It was amazing what I learned—and what I learned has translated into a much improved bottom line."

## Final Analysis

When asked what gives him the most satisfaction in his work, Wepfer comes back to the problem solving theme. He tells a story about a woman with a six-week history of total body hives, who was almost neurotic from 24-hour itching. Her doctors were having trouble treating her, and according to Wepfer, they eventually told her, "'Just go see Scott and just do whatever he tells you.' So she came to us and we put her on a homeopathic to quickly get her symptoms under control, while her regimen had time to correct the underlying cause of her hives."

Wepfer continues, saying, "I think we've developed a good reputation in town. The doctors see results from us, so they are comfortable with recommending us. So we work hard to make good recommendations that help our patients get better, and we continue to get referrals."

Wepfer likes to reference scripture to help illustrate his philosophy as health care provider. "I tell a lot of my patients that my favorite quote from the Bible is John 10:10, where Jesus said 'I came that they might have life.' And it intrigues me to no end that he didn't stop there," he says. "He went on to say, 'and have it in abundance.'"

And that's what Wepfer is trying to do—to help people enjoy "life in abundance."

"The most satisfaction I receive is hearing how we've helped people improve their quality of life by helping to improve their health," he says. **ap**

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