



Pharmacist on the Front Lines of a Pandemic - Q&A with Allan Rajesky

How did you find yourself needing to prepare for an unexpected pandemic?

It certainly took a little while to kick in how pharmacy practice was going to change and evolve throughout the pandemic. At first, it felt like this was just going to be a short-term change, and things would go back to normal in a week or two. Maybe I was a little naive! Therefore, even though we started to try to stock up on some higher demand items like inhalers, toilet paper, hand sanitizer, etc., we did not get anything close to large enough supplies to get us through even a few weeks of these increased customer demands. We quickly had to improvise some new processes and policies, but I found that our team adapted quickly along with our customers and patients, so things were relatively smooth with the transition to the new world.

How is life at your store different from normal now?

We definitely saw a significant increase in our prescription counts and front store inquiries/purchases. This is partly due to the 30 day limit that was set initially, and the fact that we didn't reduce our hours, so we were getting more patients that weren't able to access their usual pharmacy. I actually had to hire more staff and increase people's hours that we have maintained today. Once we get back to 90 day supplies, we'll reassess those needs, but at the time being, each staff member is working non-stop the entire shift! We now do a lot more screening over the phone and encourage deliveries a lot more often. Our deliveries easily tripled, if not more, so I had to add a second delivery company to handle the volume.

What kind of safety measures or PPE are you using to do your job? How are you staying safe?

We have chosen to implement continuous masking since we have several people that are not able to stay 6 feet apart. If we are in close contact with patient (i.e. fitting home health care items like braces, administering injections, or fitting compression socks) we also provide the patient a mask to wear.

Early on in the pandemic, we found that despite our best efforts to screen people on the phone, and discourage those with symptoms from coming into the store, we would still get a few people visiting that should not have come in. This necessitated us building plexiglass barriers between our pharmacy area and front store as well as between our front cash and checkout area. We also tend to do more of our counseling from behind the glass, and direct people to items versus taking them to the front store products. This is a bit of an adjustment as we like to offer a little more personalized service, but we're adjusting!

What have your interactions been like with customers/consumers/patrons?

Overall, we have been able to communicate changes fairly well, and people have been very understanding for the most part. Sure - there are the occasional frustrated clients, but we've always had an amazing group of patients we're lucky to work with, so things went quite well. My staff has always gone out of their way to spend a little extra time with our customers and patients, and develop a strong



working relationship with them, and that has shown to be beneficial on so many fronts including when these crisis situations arise like pandemics!

How are you managing the extra cleaning practices?

The extra cleaning has been challenging, and part of the reason we had to add some extra bodies and hours to our staffing levels. We thoroughly wipe down as many areas as we can every hour or two, and that takes 1 person quite a while to do a good job at it.

What do you want people to know about your job?

I think my main message to everyone is to just share my appreciation for the way my staff has handled this last few months in a challenging environment. They have gone beyond all expectations to continue to deliver high level patient care, and work to ensure we had access to the front store items people were looking for. Everyone has spent extra time sourcing products and maintaining our inventory levels while continuing to deliver on all the "usual" specialty areas in our pharmacy like home health care fittings, specialty compounding, breast pump rentals/sales, and more! Everyone has stepped up to fill in any gaps in the healthcare system, such as increased prescribing by APAs (where appropriate), additional in store assessments, prescription adaptations and renewals, and we still are doing our utmost to perform initial CACPs, SMMA's, and follow-ups so our high level of service doesn't drop off due to the pandemic.

How has your family been affected by your work?

Other than not seeing me as often as they would have liked, generally things on the homefront have gone fairly well. There is a brief pause for hugs when I get home so I can "sterilize" myself, but other than that, we've managed to keep things fairly normal. My two boys and wife have been very supportive of me since the time I decided to venture into pharmacy ownership and continuing right through to the work we were taking on due to the pandemic. Couldn't do this without them!