



## **Pharmacist on the Front Lines of a Pandemic - Q&A with Dr. Lynn Le**

COVID has disrupted the normalcy of our lives, and its impact has been universally felt in one form or another. It has especially strained community pharmacies and their operations. I'm sure many pharmacists share a similar experience to mine by facing the challenges this pandemic has brought.

The first issue was the procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE) and minimal government assistance for pharmacies. My pharmacy had to find their own suppliers for PPE and fund these costs out-of-pocket to keep their employees and patients safe. This was important because pharmacists were still performing injections and assisting patients with OTC recommendations.

Telephone lines were flooded since most assessments were done through a call on top of refills, prescriptions, and questions that were being phoned in. The phone never stopped ringing. The volume of patients and workflow increased significantly as patients wanted to fill as much medication as they could due to the termination of their insurance, to isolate, and out of fear. Patients were very afraid and confused, demonstrated by the flood of questions pharmacies received and the increasing demands from patients.

With the 30-days supply restrictions, I've had my fair share of battles with patients to explain that this is a proactive measure to prevent depletion of stock that it is necessary to ensure all patients may get the medication they need. I was also battling misinformation every day from patients and the media, especially regarding dispensing fees and insurance surrounding these limitations.

Personally, I have stopped visiting my elderly parents because I am an essential front-line worker. My worst fear is contracting the infection and spreading it to the hundreds of people I see daily, let alone my loved ones. With that said, I work diligently to keep sanitizing and limiting exposure from one person to another. It is terrifying when pharmacy personnel and patients alike do not utilize PPE or practice distancing. This has also impacted me personally because I will become a pharmacist soon and through this pandemic, it's startling to see that pharmacists are not being recognized enough for the essential work they do.

Many health care promotion events and appreciation for the front lines have excluded pharmacists, which has been very disappointing, especially as pharmacists have responded to the needs of so many patients in these unprecedented times. I really hope that all the patients



who needed their pharmacist at this time remember how accessible and essential their services are.

I also hope pharmacists are advocating for themselves at this time because I'm proud of how pharmacists have stepped up. Pharmacists have been adaptable and resilient, have helped to comfort patients, and spread reliable health information to their communities. At times when most clinics had closed and resources had been difficult to access, pharmacists remained accessible and have been filling the care gaps to help patients get what they need, whether that be assessing the patient and renewing medications or helping to manage acute and chronic conditions. With or without the pandemic, pharmacies serve their communities and improve health outcome for patients. Although the pandemic has been an obstacle, I feel patients have still received the same great level of care.