



Pharmacist on the Front Lines of a Pandemic - Q&A with Rita Lyster

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

Although we were watching information regarding the pandemic, it seemed to be out there in the world but not locally. Then the weekend of March 13th, everything changed. As a relief pharmacist, I did have some shifts booked and then the decision needed to be made of whether I still go in for those shifts or be held in reserve in case one of my colleagues became infected and needed to be relieved in order to keep the store open. We opted for this choice. I had also taken on a new job March 1st which involved working from home, calling patients and this work continued.

How is life at your store different from normal now?

I haven't been in a store since the pandemic started and have continued to work from home. Customers have been extremely happy to hear from me, especially isolated seniors. They are very happy that their care has continued, and they have really appreciated my outreach to them.

As an RxA Board Member, I was also available to support my colleagues and direct them to resources they may have needed. I also activated a Twitter account and became active in promoting pharmacists recognition by the government as "essential front line healthcare workers" and then to help secure PPE.

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

Working from home, I haven't needed to wear PPE however I do make sure that I follow safety measures when going out and about in my community, shopping or visiting family.

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

Customers have been very engaged with my virtual outreach. I have found they are happy to take the time to discuss their medications and are receptive to my suggestions.

Many times, the phone call ends with their appreciation for the care.

How are you managing the extra cleaning practices?

I keep hand sanitizer and masks in the car for when I am out and about.

What do you want people to know about your job?

Pharmacists need to be commended for stepping up to the plate and remaining accessible and looking after the health needs of their customers. When many physician offices closed and became virtual, pharmacists continued to manage an overwhelming volume of calls for information and support as well as assessing and renewing prescriptions in order to keep their customer's medical needs addressed in a timely manner. There was an enormous increase in workload both from volume of calls



for information, drug shortages and managing inventory, absorbing new and evolving information for the safety of their team as well as their customers.

How has your family been affected by your work?

Personally, it was a relief that I could work from home as my father was in Long Term Care. This way I could keep myself at low risk and continue to visit him once visiting restrictions were lifted July 23rd.