



Pharmacist on the Front Lines of a Pandemic - Q&A with Todd Prochnau

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

Like everyone else I was caught off guard with the speed of change that occurred once the pandemic was declared. I remember learning in pharmacy school about how it would be inevitable that a pandemic would someday occur when person to person transmission occurred with a novel virus. However, despite knowing this, I felt far from prepared. Like everyone else I adapted on the fly and we changed things on a daily basis at the pharmacy.

How is life at your store different from normal now?

Initially there was a lot of fear and anxiety among patients, customers, and some colleagues. As a pharmacist and manager I have spent a lot of time listening to and responding to concerns of patients and some employees. This has been helpful as most times I am able to reassure people and offer a calm and credible source of information. In some ways I feel like I have connected more with my patients and employees than ever before.

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

Our pharmacy and store team has adopted continuous mask wearing. I believe there is sufficient data on asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission to warrant this. We are also wearing additional PPE when sanitizing and completing direct contact patient care services. We are also giving masks to patients who don't have one when we perform a direct contact patient care service like an injection.

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

They have varied immensely. Many people have different levels of comfort and stress with the pandemic. Some are more worried than they should be and some aren't worried enough. I've found part of each interaction is figuring out where the person falls and then trying to either reassure them or educate them.

How are you managing the extra cleaning practices?

We have scheduled times throughout the day that our team completes the added sanitization and cleaning practices. It isn't always easy to fit it in but we recognize its importance. It also reassures staff and the public.



What do you want people to know about your job?

Right now it is really centred around drug shortages. It seems that since Alberta began its relaunch strategy the public had a lot less patience with the temporary 30 day dispense policy. The view for many is that since Alberta is reopening the economy drug supply must be stable. As pharmacists we know this is not the case and there continuous to be tremendous pressure on drug supply both nationally and internationally. Canada had major problems with drug supply prior to this pandemic and of course COVID-19 has only exposed many of the weaknesses in our drug supply. It would help if the public understood how serious this situation is and that the 30 day policy was there to protect all Albertans.

How has your family been affected by your work?

I am married to a pharmacist and we have a 2 year old son and 4 year old daughter. At the start of the pandemic they were attending daycare so when daycares closed we were scrambling to find childcare as both of us needed to be at work.