



Pharmacist on the Front Lines of a Pandemic - Q&A with Janice Chua

Janice Chua is a clinical pharmacist and pharmacy owner of Landmark Pharmacy in Calgary. She has been in community practice for 25 years, passionate about medication management and preventative self-care. Outside of pharmacy, she loves travelling and enjoying the outdoors.

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

A: The experience gained from SARS was invaluable. I was a pharmacy manager in Singapore at the time; there were the necessary hand washing and personal precautionary steps that needed to be taken, however, being that COVID-19 appears to be much more contagious, experience gained from SARS needed to be extrapolated. We had to gradually modify our practice as more information was made available on the characteristics of COVID-19

Initially, I was reading any news and updates I could find on COVID-19 from pharmacy practices in different countries. Shortly after the Alberta College of Pharmacy, Alberta Pharmacists' Association and Alberta Health Services began to release information regularly. RxA also started providing daily updates. I then wrote up guidelines for my relief pharmacist, who covers me whenever I am away. The guidelines included routine procedures like cleaning and disinfecting the pharmacy, the safe use of drugs such as ACE/Hydroxyquinone and PPE best practices.

Q: How are you addressing the safety of your staff and patients during this time?

A: In a few short weeks, everyone was asked to work from home; the businesses in the mall were closed. Only the clinics, grocery store and pharmacy, are open at this point. This was when we realised that the COVID-19 is not going to go away anytime soon. We started looking out for any walk-in customers with cold symptoms and prepared for the COVID-19 assessment. A week later, we donned surgical masks. We also installed safe-distancing floor stickers and countertop plexiglass protective barriers. Recently, we closed our store shutters to just a door's width and posted advisories on a standing notice board to advise patients to practice social distancing before entering the pharmacy.

Q: How are you finding ways to overcome the communication and patient care barriers?

A: I worked with the doctors in the clinic to determine how we are going to continue to provide the best possible care for our patients, especially seniors. We meet regularly to update each other on changes in our practicing environment. The clinic indicated to the patients that the pharmacy provides free prescription delivery; this helps in providing seamless pharmacy services. However, we had to stop pharmacy services that required close contact such as blood pressure monitoring and use of the consultation room. Care plans are communicated to the



patient in an open area with the plexiglass shield with no other patients in earshot to maintain patient privacy.

RxA has also been working hard to advocate our roles as pharmacists. We were able to safeguard the supply of medications to make sure that everyone got their medications and financial support by the insurance companies through this time of uncertainty. We also received PPE from the provincial government, which is a welcome show of support. Our involvement and partnership with RxA is crucial; Nothing beats the voices of practicing pharmacists on the frontline. We appreciate the support of our pharmacy association and, as a result, empowered to fulfill our roles without our safety being compromised. I've read stories that many pharmacists around the world were infected by COVID-19 and have even lost their lives.

Q: Similarly, how is your pharmacy team finding ways to stay healthy and relieve stress?

A: Our pharmacy hours have been shortened to follow the clinic hours as the patient traffic is significantly reduced with a change of consulting strategy from COVID-19 impact. We have adapted our workflow to minimize patients having to wait in the pharmacy; we encourage patients to call in at least an hour ahead so we can prepare their medications and, if necessary, even have it delivered. To make sure we rest well, we take this time to go for exercise and relax. I started knitting again.