

Burn the Ships!

I have heard this phrase throughout my lifetime and as I looked into where the phrase originated, I found several different references: a Spanish Conquistador, the Vikings, and even biblical connections. In all instances, though, **the meaning of “Burn the Ships” is that you cannot go back. You must press forward into the unknown. You have passed the point of no return.**

I thought about this phrase a lot as I look at community-based pharmacy transformation in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. As community-based practitioners, so many things have been thrown at us, some expected, many not and we were left to try to figure out how do we deal with it. We’ve had to pivot multiple times, transform our practices for Flip the Pharmacy, and also reengineer our patient care processes and procedures to keep both patients and staff safe. The phrase “Burn the Ships” becomes even more meaningful to me as I contemplate the resurgence of COVID-19 cases and the COVID-19 vaccines that are getting closer to distribution.

Community-based pharmacies will play a major role in helping our country build immunity to COVID-19—but we must be prepared, we must be ready, and we must be focused. There will be much planning that needs to be done if all CPESN USA pharmacies, especially those that are participating in Flip the Pharmacy, are to be successful. This is the time to demonstrate not just to our own communities but to our states and to our country the value of community-based pharmacy. COVID-19 has helped to highlight the tremendous services that we provide, the access we give to patients, and our ability to move quickly in times of crisis, like this pandemic.

There will never be the “normal” again. There will be a new normal. With that new normal, community-based pharmacies will need to not only be ready to provide new services—but deliver them in a new way. Optimal use of our technician colleagues will be paramount—including preparing them for technician product verification (TPV) and training them as vaccinators. We need to integrate technology to not only improve the efficiencies of our practice—but to better serve our patients safely and effectively. Product distribution is just one aspect of our practice—no longer the main focus. We must continue our fight for fair and rightful payment for patient care services and to be recognized as a health care provider—and not just a purveyor of products.

Yes, it is time for all of us to Burn the Ships! Our new future, our new path is in front of us. The past is over and it will just serve as a memory—times of old. Our new future will not be easy, it will not clear, and it will not be without challenges—but it is our only way. We have reached the point of no return.

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