

The Inventive Spirit that Energizes Independent Pharmacy

Within independent, community-based pharmacy, there isn't a lack of innovation. Innovation and inventiveness are everywhere. Most times, it is a failure to adopt the innovation with other community-based pharmacies that cause the lack of awareness across America. Here are a few great examples of the inventive spirit of independent pharmacy that, perhaps, you can adopt as your own.

Want to talk about innovation? Just start with Andrea Kowalski, pharmacist, and director of clinical services at Shivers Pharmacy, a multi-store independent pharmacy in Southeast Ohio. "One of the things that I love about independent pharmacies is their inventive and innovative mindset," exclaimed Kowalski.

And her pharmacy is a great example. During the COVID pandemic, Shivers pharmacists and pharmacy staff noticed the impact of lockdowns and isolation on many of their regular customers. "Our patients were not able to visit the pharmacy and interact with the staff and other patients. We could sense the toll it was taking on their mental health," shared Kowalski.

So, Kowalski and her colleagues designed consultations geared to assessing a patient's anxiety (using the General Anxiety Disorder-7 or GAD-7) and depression (using the Pharmacy Health Questionnaire-9 or PHQ-9). Consultations were conducted over the phone during the pandemic.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. What was once a taboo topic, especially in rural Southeastern Ohio, was now being tackled head-on. Kowalski firmly believes the local, trusting relationships the pharmacy has earned with its customers make the difference.

Pharmacists were able to provide resources or lifestyle changes to help improve mental health. High scores were referred to a doctor. After nearly two years of data, the numbers are significant. During follow-up visits, 73% of patients felt their mental health improved or stayed the same from the previous visit. Even more valuable, the 27% of patients who reported worsening symptoms of depression or anxiety were able to be identified through this program and receive next-level treatment.

The program is now part of a pilot payer program that allows Shivers Pharmacy to bill the insurance company directly for their pharmacists' time. Kowalski hopes the program expands to other independent pharmacies within their CPESN® Ohio clinically integrated network.

"Our independence gives us the freedom to pay attention to our patients and what they need the most, added Kowalski. "And our passion for our patients pushes us to find solutions and be inventive."

Part 2 will be available in November 2022.