

Corner Drug: Finding the Time to be Pharmacists

by Will Lockwood

Corner Drug Co. has been serving Woodland, Calif., near Sacramento for over 100 years. Located in the heart of the historic downtown, the pharmacy is currently owned and run by the team of pharmacist Lisa Shelley and her husband and business manager, Edward Shelley. Lisa's connection goes back to her father, Karl Hanke, who started working there in 1940 as a delivery boy on a bicycle. After WWII, Hanke got his pharmacy degree and eventually became a partner and then the owner of Corner Drug. Lisa and Edward Shelley have seen Woodland grow to a population of 50,000, and take pride in the fact that many of their customers are the second or third generation to rely on Corner Drug. Soon there will be a third-generation pharmacist at Corner Drug as well: Lisa and Edward's daughter, Sara, will receive her Pharm.D. from the University of the Pacific Thomas J. Long School of Pharmacy this spring and will join them at the store.

What's New

While continuity is clearly a hallmark of Corner Drug, there's also been quite a bit of change. "When Lisa's father was here, it was three pharmacists using typewriters," notes Edward. "Then Lisa came in and brought in the first computer about 25 years ago." The store currently uses McKesson Pharmacy Systems



Lisa and Edward with the newest Shelley pharmacist, Sara, in their Woodland, Calif. store.

Pharmaserv. Since Lisa's father retired, they've picked up the pace and added more technology. They've been using Parata's Pharmacy 2000 workflow for about the last three years and just added Parata RDS robotics in December 2007. The Shelleys have also made the decision to add TeleManager Technologies IVR, which integrates with Pharmaserv. This was a tough decision, according to Edward, but one that has proven right. "We thought that our customers weren't going to like it," he says. "But guess what? It is so nice. If the IVR is down, people will get one of us and say 'I wanted to talk to the computer.'"

According to Edward, the workflow system has eliminated the potential for confusion about



Corner Drug strives to offer the unique service found at a hometown pharmacy.

where a prescription is. The staff would run into situations where they'd refill a prescription because they couldn't find it and had no way of determining its status. The information provided by workflow is even more important when considering that Corner Drug continues to offer free delivery in town. "If a prescription is out for delivery, but we don't realize it and fill it again, it doesn't take many of those to start losing money," says Edward.

Customer Focused

When it came to looking at robotics, it was Sara Shelley who was a major influence. "Automation made a big impression on me in my work experience during pharmacy school," she says. "It's silly for me to spend a good part of my day counting pills by fives when I've spent years in school learning how medications work and how to help patients get the most out of them." She sums up her view this way: "If the pharmacy is so busy that the pharmacists spend the whole day counting pills, with little time to spend counseling patients, I wouldn't want to work there." Incidentally, the Parata RDS has not only drawn the attention of Corner Drug's customers, who are fascinated to see it work, but of other pharmacists as well. "They've been impressed by its capacity and the fact that it works on air," says Edward. But the real point of investing in robotics was to support Sara's belief that a pharmacist's place is with patients, not in front of a pill-counting tray. "The things Sara's interested in, like compounding, counseling, and immunizations, take time," says Edward. "We're looking to robotics as a way to make sure she has this time."

Community Pharmacists

It turns out that the community wants access to the pharmacists at Corner Drug as well.

"We're in a small town," points out Edward. "It's funny — my wife and I go to church here in town and go to the grocery store after. People stop us and ask for counseling on their medications. I think that's one of the big things about the hometown pharmacy with pharmacists you know." The Shelleys see workflow and now the robot as big reasons why Corner Drug is in such a good position. Even facing competition from chains, grocery stores, and big-box stores, they can fill prescriptions and still be out in public and see people. Sara's arrival, with her up-to-the-minute education and her enthusiasm, will help renew this dedication to customers. "Hopefully, technology will continue to free up time for us to spend interacting with patients and offering clinical programs," Sara says. **CT**



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