

PHARMACY SERVICES FOR THE UNDERSERVED

PSSC—Access for All

Telepharmacy delivers comprehensive services in rural Alaska

Reducing administrative costs and increasing access to prescription drugs and comprehensive pharmacy services are important goals for health care organizations that participate in the 340B Drug Pricing Program, and the Health Resources and Services Administration's Office of Pharmacy Affairs supports several Alternative Methods Demonstration Projects to encourage the development of cre-



PHOTO BY TOMMY LEONARD III

ADMNs allow clinics to meet the needs of patients all across Alaska.

ative pharmacy approaches to meeting these goals. One such project, approved under former Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson, was implemented at the Alaska Native Medical Center (ANMC), which employs telepharmacy to increase access to prescription medications and pharmacy services for patients in rural communities.

Improved access

Utilizing innovative software, video-phone systems, and automated dispensing machines (ADMNs), the Anchorage-based ANMC created a pharmacy network with 12 remote clinics. The network has improved access to pharmaceuticals, decreased physical and economic barriers to drug therapy, and allowed isolated remote clinics to offer comprehensive pharmacy services to both native and nonnative patients. Full integration of the new technologies has made it possible for small, isolated rural clinics to share virtual pharmacy services.

Pharmacy staffers are physically located in the main pharmacy in Anchorage, and they allocate their time as needed to the remote clinics. Patients bring their pre-

scriptions to and pick up their medications at their home clinics. Electronic medical records are kept for each patient using the telepharmacy network.

When a patient presents a prescription, it is faxed to the main pharmacy in Anchorage, where a pharmacist examines and processes the prescription. Including a network pharmacist in the patient's care enables the keeping of a complete and accurate patient record.

After evaluating the prescribed regimen, the pharmacist in Anchorage enters the order, and the prescription label is generated in the local clinic. A specially trained health care provider retrieves the bar-coded prescription label, which is scanned to release the matching prepackaged medication from the ADM in the clinic. As a final check, the bar-coded, prepackaged medication is scanned to confirm that the correct medication was released. The label is attached to the package, and the medication is dispensed to the waiting patient. The patient is then offered a two-way video consultation with a pharmacist.

Decreased costs

By utilizing the central distribution system of the main pharmacy, the clinics have significantly decreased their administrative time and costs associated with inventory maintenance. Each ADM produces daily drug utilization reports, which are reviewed each day in the main pharmacy. When drug stocks drop below a predetermined level, new inventory is shipped to the clinic. Information regarding the lot numbers and expira-

tion dates of products in the ADMs is maintained and monitored at the main pharmacy, which relieves clinic staffers of the need to perform monthly inspections for outdates and facilitates expeditious responses to drug recalls. The clinics also realize savings from getting all the benefits of better formulary control, "virtual" staff, and up-to-date drug information technology without having to establish an in-house pharmacy.

Another positive outcome of creating the telepharmacy network is that the clinics are now compliant with one more of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations' national patient safety goals: reconciling medications across the continuum of care. The clinics also benefit from annual on-site audits performed by a network pharmacist.

Comprehensive pharmacy services

Patients in the communities served by the ANMC telepharmacy network now receive affordable comprehensive pharmacy services, including pharmacists' interventions and counseling for all medications dispensed. The real-time availability of acute and chronic medications has also improved compliance with drug therapy among patients who live in areas where the dependable transport of people and goods can be very challenging.

This innovative use of technology has

allowed comprehensive pharmacy services to be offered to hundreds of patients in isolated and underserved communities in Alaska. And the program is expanding. The ANMC telepharmacy network plans to add 14 more clinics within the next year.

Written by Lt. Karen C. Williams, BPharm, MBA, USPHS, of the Health Resources and Services Administration Office of Pharmacy Affairs (OPA) in consultation with Comdr. Judy L. Rose, PharmD, USPHS telepharmacy manager at the Alaska Native Medical Center, OPA Director Jimmy R. Mitchell, BPharm, MPH, MS, and other members of the OPA staff.

The Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Pharmacy Services Support Center (PSSC) was established under a contract between HRSA and APhA to help HRSA's Office of Pharmacy Affairs achieve its mission of promoting access to comprehensive pharmacy services for all. PSSC carries out this mission by developing targeted information resources and bringing issues and concerns of unique pharmacy practice into the conversations and activities of national pharmacy organizations. This PSSC column is designed to build awareness of the challenges and opportunities that exist in providing pharmacy access for all in the wider pharmacy community.

Questions or comments? Please contact the HRSA Pharmacy Services Support Center at 800-628-6297 or pssc.aphanet.org

Five ways to celebrate American Pharmacists Month

1. Create individual brochures that introduce each pharmacist in your organization (e.g., *Meet Jane Doe, Your Patient Care Provider*) and promote the services each can provide.
2. Conduct a brown bag medication therapy review. Set aside a day and time for patients to present all their current prescription and nonprescription medications, as well as any herbal products or other dietary supplements they are taking. Assess the medication therapies for appropriateness and work with the patients and their health care providers to improve patients' self-management of their medications.
3. Set aside a day to provide health screenings for high blood pressure, diabetes, or osteoporosis.
4. Promote the pharmacist's role in public health:

Conduct a flu immunization campaign in the pharmacy and link it to American Pharmacists Month.

5. Write an article on the importance of medication adherence to run in a health column in your local newspaper.

Know Your
MEDICINE
Know Your
PHARMACIST
Talk to your
Pharmacist
Today

American Pharmacists Month

Going fast!**Get your American Pharmacists Month Starter Kit**

American Pharmacists Month is one month closer, and it's time to plan your activities to celebrate your profession. Ace these questions about pharmacy and your Association and you'll be eligible to win an American Pharmacists Month Starter Kit. Remember: October is American Pharmacists Month. Celebrate the achievements of your profession!

1. APhA became an agent of the government in collecting, checking, and repacking for military use what drug that was in very short supply during World War II?
2. APhA worked with the Red Cross to exchange pharmaceuticals for prisoners of what country in the 1960s?
3. In what year was the Bowl of Hygieia introduced into the APhA logo?
4. During the 1930s and 1940s, APhA collaborated with which other association to work for propharmacy legislation?
5. Which U.S. vice president was also a pharmacist?

E-mail your answers to PT@aphanet.org by August 8. Five winners will be chosen at random from among the entries with all correct answers. Winners will receive an American Pharmacists Month Starter Kit containing mugs, t-shirts, buttons, decals, a poster, a *Planning Guide*, and a *Product Guide*. Look for the names of July's winners in the September issue of *Pharmacy Today*. Not batting a thousand? Try again with the August American Pharmacists Month Quiz.

Answers to June's Quiz

1. The discovery of adulterations and substitutions of drugs in New York in the 1840s led to the passage of what legislation affecting the drug market? **Drug Importation Act of 1848**
2. The American Pharmaceutical Association (now the American Pharmacists Association) held its first organizational meeting in 1852 in what city? **Philadelphia**
3. During which war was the APhA annual meeting first suspended? **Civil War (1861)**
4. The death of which U.S. president was announced at the opening of the APhA annual meeting in Kansas City in 1881? **James Garfield**
5. What year was the first issue of the *Journal of the American Pharmaceutical Association* published? **1912**

June winners of the American Pharmacists Month Starter Kit will be announced in the August issue of *Pharmacy Today*.