



Alumni Advocate In A Big Way

Kristen Holt with State Delegate Donald B. Elliott

BY CHRISTIANNA MCCAUSLAND

At a Walgreens pharmacy in Washington, D.C., patients get a glimpse of what a pharmacy could be: the pharmacist is out from behind the counter so he or she can provide more counseling to patients, offer clinical services, and answer questions. Technicians handle routine dispensing, freeing the pharmacist to work with patients, conducting other health care services such as medication therapy management.

Walgreens calls this new store format the “Well Experience.” Steve Bouyoukas, PharmD ’00, explains that the store plays an important role as a case study for those legislating for pharmacists to practice to the top of their license—and get reimbursed for their efforts.

“We are one of the most under-utilized resources in health care,” says Bouyoukas, who is Walgreens pharmacy supervisor for the Baltimore area and oversees the pilot store. “We need policymakers to know that we do make a difference in patient lives, and showing them how we do it is very important going forward.”

The legislative advocacy efforts of School of Pharmacy alumni illustrate the many ways pharmacists can speak out on behalf of the field. Whether alumni are on Capitol Hill petitioning for provider status or, like Bouyoukas, building evidence-based,



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real-time examples of how pharmacy can contribute to improved patient outcomes while cutting costs, graduates from the School are actively involved in shaping the future of pharmacy.

Bouyoukas credits his time at the School with giving him a fundamental understanding of the practice issues facing pharmacy. His participation in a business management pathway while in School has been invaluable as his current position relies heavily on business acumen in addition to knowledge of pharmacy practice.

Although the Walgreens Well Experience pilot has expanded to more than 400 of its stores across the country, Bouyoukas knows there's still more ground to be covered. In Baltimore, for example, there are five new Well Experience stores planned, but they're currently on hold due to laws and regulations of the Maryland Board of Pharmacy that Bouyoukas and his team are working to change. He notes that there's value any time a pharmacist can articulate his or her experience impacting patient outcomes in a conversation with a local lawmaker.

“We want to be able to show lawmakers we make a difference when we are allowed to practice at the top of our license, when we're allowed to sit down with patients and play an important role in their health care—practicing as part of a team with other health care professionals,” he says. “Any time we have a chance to do that we have to seize it.”

Lynette Bradley-Baker, PhD '99, BSP '92, director of professional alliance development at the American Association

of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP), comes to advocacy from a different angle. She works on issues at the intersection of professional practice and pharmacy academia. As part of the external affairs division of AACP under William Lang, MPH, the organization's vice president of policy and advocacy, “My efforts are focused on working with other pharmacy practice organizations to build evidence for what pharmacists are trained to and can do to improve their patient outcomes,” she says.

According to Bradley-Baker, her current work was informed by her previous position at the School, where she was on the faculty for two years before joining AACP. Her work with students and faculty along with her own research enriched and expanded her understanding of the contributions that can be made by pharmacists. It also gave her a broad perspective of the challenges and concerns of those in the field.

“While I'm not on Capitol Hill testifying, advocacy really is broader than that,” she continues. “I ensure our schools and colleges of pharmacy are highlighted and that we are showcasing what pharmacists can do and what some of our faculty are doing at their practice sites. This really builds the case for the expansion of the pharmacist's role and for pharmacists to be recognized as providers by the Department of Health and Human Services.”

The “Script Your Future” campaign, of which AACP is a sponsor, exemplifies this case-building. The national campaign challenges schools of pharmacy to educate both the general

public and the health care communities on the importance of medication adherence. (It's worth noting that in 2012 University of Maryland School of Pharmacy students received one of the national Script Your Future challenge awards.) Like the innovations at Walgreens pharmacy, the outcome results from the campaign build valuable evidence for AACP's national advocacy efforts.

These are just the sort of examples that people like Kristen Holt, PharmD '05, MPH, are looking for to show the value of pharmacy to policymakers. Holt is currently the assistant director of quality improvement and regulatory affairs at the Johns Hopkins Hospital Department of Pharmacy. She was active in pressing for legislation in the Maryland General Assembly in support of collaborative drug therapy management (CDTM) contracts through volunteering with the Maryland Society of Health-System Pharmacists (MSHP). But she traces her introduction into the Maryland state legislative process further back, to her time at the School of Pharmacy.

"My initial exposure was through an internship in the University's Government Affairs Office, which oriented me to Annapolis," she recalls. "During my rotation, I participated in the research process facilitating proposals for when the General Assembly convened, listened to hearings, and spoke with representatives on Pharmacy Legislative Day."

That experience gave her knowledge of the legislative process and piqued her passion for advocacy. She joined the legislative committee of MSHP at a time when a sundown provision was about to reverse gains made on CDTM contracts. As MSHP's volunteer coordinator within the Maryland Pharmacy Coalition, Holt joined a group of like-minded advocates whose work helped extend the contracts. Having taken a leadership class while at the School that taught the history of the original CDTM contracts bill put forward in the early 2000s, Holt was already well-versed in the importance of the issue.

"It was exciting to find something early in my career where I could contribute and potentially make a difference," she says. "And it was motivating to discover many others who thought that this was an important issue and joined the effort. Together this diverse coalition of pharmacists determined a united conversation piece to engage the legislators."

Holt still volunteers with MSHP "because I see what can happen when we're not active. ... There will be policies made that don't reflect the value brought [by pharmacists] to the detriment of our patients' health."

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As these alumni demonstrate, involvement in advocacy takes many forms. Perhaps the first and easiest step is to join one's state pharmacy organization or get involved in a state or national pharmacy legislative day. Bradley-Baker encourages alumni to find what they are passionate about and then locate a group that can help advance that enthusiasm. The organization may not be pharmacy-practice specific—it could be in the field of gerontology or clinical pharmacy—but these groups often need members who can be a voice for pharmacy as they advance their own legislative agenda.

"You don't need to testify at your state legislature," says Bradley-Baker. "You can write a letter or email your representative stating that you see the need for a potential change in a state law. Every little bit helps." ☺