

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY WISCONSIN SCHOOL OF PHARMACY "MORTAR & PENCIL" STUDENT WRITING CLUB:

Business Member Spotlight: Tomahawk Pharmacy

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As a Tomahawk native, Tyler Stevenson, PharmD, grew up working in independent pharmacies in town and progressed to owning his very own independent pharmacy: Tomahawk Pharmacy. Stevenson's passion for personalized patient care is what motivated him to open Tomahawk Pharmacy in 2015. Since then, the pharmacy has moved into a larger facility and expanded its patient care services to provide the community with more than just prescription medications.

Day to Day Practice

Serving the community is at the center of Tomahawk Pharmacy's values. As a Tomahawk local, Stevenson knows that serving his community extends beyond

the pharmacy's doors. He was a former member of the school board for three years, was a past president of the town's youth mentorship program, and has supported the town's fundraising events. Stevenson's background means the pharmacy does not stop at dispensing medications and offering vaccines.

In Stevenson's role as the pharmacy owner, the majority of his days are spent performing managerial tasks, such as contracting with insurance companies, budgeting for the pharmacy as a whole with respect to staff hours and products sold, and researching and implementing revenue streams that are non-insurance and non-pharmacy-benefit-manager-based. On Wednesdays, Stevenson steps into the role of a staff pharmacist, offering his skills and expertise by checking prescriptions,

providing consultations, and administering various vaccines. In both of his roles, Stevenson gets the opportunity to interact with his staff in what they describe as a fun, family-based work environment that is accommodating for employees in many aspects. With activities such as staff contests and group trips to the Fireside Dinner Theatre, the pharmacy team is the epitome of a family-friendly business and takes pride in their closeness both with each other and the community. This also extends to the other healthcare providers in the area. Stevenson says that a good rapport with the town's providers and clinics as a whole has provided the pharmacy with collaborative interprofessional relationships, allowing them to provide the best patient care and advertise the pharmacy's services, such as compounding and pouch packaging.

Below: Tomahawk Pharmacy in Tomahawk, WI. Top-right: Tyler Stevenson, PharmD. Bottom-right: Kayci Stevenson, PharmD.



Despite the hometown feel of Tomahawk Pharmacy, their influence is felt at the state level. Close connections with a state legislator, who is also a Tomahawk resident, have allowed Stevenson to give community pharmacies a voice and advocate for legislation at the state level.

Raising the Bar

Tomahawk Pharmacy is certainly leading the charge when it comes to practicing at the top of their license, starting with the members they have on staff. A certified medical technologist and a certified veterinary/compounding technician are just some of the staff members with specialized training. With these different backgrounds, the pharmacy is able to offer more to the populations they serve, such as point-of-care lab testing and veterinary/compounding services. Above all the specialized training, Stevenson says that the genuineness and sense of responsibility that his staff possesses is what each patient remembers, strengthening the bond between the pharmacy and those who walk through its doors. Stevenson says his and his staff's ability to pivot at a moment's notice is how the pharmacy is so successful. As the owner, he reflects on how grateful he is that business decisions are a collaborative effort between him and his team, rather than corporate-office leaders who do not have the opportunity to interact with their patients. Having started from nothing eight years ago, the pharmacy has been able to grow in ways they never expected, such as administering COVID-19 vaccines both at the pharmacy and at multiple onsite pop-up clinics for businesses around town.

This exemplary staff includes Stevenson's wife, Kayci Stevenson, PharmD, who spearheaded the 10,000-plus COVID vaccines that the pharmacy has administered and serves as director of clinical services. In addition, Stevenson mentions the pharmacy's operations manager, Jackie Cherney, CPhT; their IT and med sync coordinator, Gina Karl, CVT; lab manager Erin Ray; staff pharmacist Rebecca Pashek; and pharmacist manager Amanda Barkley.

Bumps in the Road

As an independent pharmacy in a rural community, Tomahawk Pharmacy faces a variety of challenges. One is the struggle for reimbursement from insurance companies.

In today's job market, Tomahawk Pharmacy also periodically struggles with finding pharmacists and technicians. The market, combined with the rural community's location, makes this even more difficult at times. Stevenson himself was raised in the "up north" environment and adores everything the area has to offer, such as hunting and fishing. However, he says that not many people want to move to northern Wisconsin's rural communities unless they grew up around, and know, the area. Tomahawk Pharmacy also hosts pharmacy students for introductory pharmacy practice experience (IPPE) and advanced pharmacy practice experience (APPE) rotations, but struggles to attract students due to the distance away from major cities and pharmacy schools. Despite the struggle of having his pharmacy far away from pharmacy schools, his rotations offer as many accommodations as possible to students interested in learning about independent rural pharmacies.

With Tomahawk being a small, close-knit community, Tomahawk Pharmacy has found creative ways to advertise. Stevenson has advertised through the Morning Forum, a local radio station that highlights different businesses in the community. Along with live radio broadcasts, Tomahawk Pharmacy does local advertisements in the newspaper and Facebook posts highlighting the unique services they offer. Above all, Stevenson says that the most important form of advertisement is word of mouth. Providing quality customer service to patients is what Tomahawk Pharmacy thrives on, and its patients' testimonies to other community members offers prospective patients a sense of trust in who they are receiving their care and medications from.

Moving Forward

Driven by its mission to enhance quality of life by bridging the gaps in patient care through connections, innovative services, and quality services, Tomahawk Pharmacy has countless ideas for how to prosper moving forward. Establishing a compounding service for selective prescriptions is in the near future for Tomahawk Pharmacy patients. This compounding service will provide a new level of convenience for customers, since the current nearest compounding pharmacy is a considerable drive away.

In addition to Tomahawk Pharmacy's current point of care services, they want to expand by hiring a provider as a medical director to perform test-to-treat services. When we asked Stevenson why he wanted to provide this service for community members, he said that it all stems from convenience for his patients. Being a father himself, he saw the need for the community to have access to test-to-treat care. There have been times when he did not know where to receive care for his children for minor ailments such as strep throat besides going to the emergency department. Not only would this new service provide convenience for the community, but also will save his customers a significant amount of money that they would otherwise be spending for a doctor's office visit.

With exciting services coming in the near future, we asked Stevenson what his fears were regarding implementing new services and what advice he had for other practice sites interested in initiating similar services. Stevenson said that he did not necessarily have any fears, but rather was more excited than nervous to implement a service that he knew would benefit his patients. As far as advice he has for other practice sites, Stevenson said that he likes to research the new service, reach out to other pharmacies who already have the service established, and then implement it. Stevenson also has found helpful training classes through organizations such as NCPA and PSW. These organizations also provide helpful resources and live training exercises for specific certificate programs.

In addition to being entrepreneurial with starting up new services, we asked Stevenson what advice he had for individuals who were interested in starting and managing their own independent pharmacy. Stevenson originally started Tomahawk Pharmacy in partnership with another independent pharmacy, then transitioned to owning his own independent pharmacy. He said that this partnership was a great starting point to owning a business, and that his past experience working in an independent pharmacy helped him create the community-driven pharmacy he runs today.

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