

Grateful for a Rewarding Career

By Jody Jacobson Wedret

"You shall not delay to offer of the fullness of your harvest and of the flow of your presses..." Exodus 22:28 (ESV)

It is almost 2 1/2 years since I retired. At that time, I was asked how I survived almost 40 years at the 'same' hospital as a pharmacist. I started this article at the one-year anniversary and found it again after I came back to help with COVID. And for the record, I loved being back and helping with the enormous surge in patient volume. Nonetheless, I had promised to share some career insights with my team and I hope you find them helpful and encouraging.

I am truly thankful for all the experiences I have been able to benefit from. If I'd been resistant to change, my career would have been very different and for this gift of flexibility and adaptation, I am truly g-r-a-t-e-f-u-l.

I'm not only **grateful** for the opportunities given me but for those I've sought and achieved. I became a pharmacist because a pharmacist saved my life--or at least that is how I see it. I wanted to return the favor. In the beginning, I thought that drugstore pharmacy was the ultimate in helping patients. Though I still believe that, I realized that perhaps my personality was not quite attuned to that endeavor. I would have to change either me or the practice to be successful.

1. Take the Initiative to Learn and Grow

I took **responsibility** for finding a more suitable venue which led me to ambulatory practice at an academic medical center. It was a similar practice but with a large institution and a security force behind me. The department was engaged in things I had never done before. Seeing this motivated me to come in before or after my shift and learn sterile manufacturing, something I had never

been exposed to before, despite my 1500 plus hours of hospital internship and an equal number of outpatient intern hours. I learned all about TPN, and a fair amount about oncology. My coworkers taught me the basics. I taught me the depth. A stint at Jules Stein Eye Institute at UCLA allowed me to hone all my skills at once as it was an inpatient, outpatient and sterile manufacturing site rolled into one. Later, I learned investigational drug pharmacy practice.

Learning additional skills afforded me a variety of experiences otherwise closed off or more difficult to break into without formal training and knowledge. As a professional, I felt it my duty to bring myself up to speed independently.

This motivation allowed me to **advance** intellectually and professionally. Advancing is not the memorization of someone else's guidelines; it is utilizing your knowledge and creativity to fill a void. For instance, early in my career, I developed an inhouse counselling tool since one had not yet been published. This was to enhance the information we provided during counseling before it was required. It was not part of my job description but what I felt was integral to good pharmaceutical care. Thus, while still managing the retail job requirements, I used the lulls and some of my own time to work on this project which was shared with my fellow employees.

Shortly after moving from a practice setting to a more office-based position, I ran into one of the physicians I'd worked with in a second family medicine clinic. She asked what I was doing. Although I initially thought this was invitation to have coffee and catch up, it turned out that, in her words, "we always had a pharmacist on rounds where I interned. We don't have a pharmacist on rounds. Can you

do that?" Fortunately, as long as I completed my assignments, my time could be flexible. I also assumed that if I didn't agree, it would be a long time before pharmacy was asked again. Though I had never been to these mysterious "rounds" before, I agreed and worked quickly to determine a role. By the way, the role had to be reinvented weekly as the attending position changed weekly and was occupied by a variety of folks who either thought my presence was a great idea, were neutral, or wondered why I was breathing the same air as they were. Though it took some time. I was eventually offered a clinical faculty designation (an honor without financial compensation and yet requiring the buy-in from all the different attending personalities.)

2. Discover and Develop Your Talents

Everyone has at least one talent. I discovered mine was teaching and public speaking. Admittedly, I am not as much a classroom teacher, though I have done it in more than one setting, but I do excel as a lecturer, public speaker and mentor to motivated mentees. My first opportunity to give a lecture was met with post-presentation comments like "speaker very knowledgeable" but 'speaker very nervous.' Both are true but it was one lone comment that was constructive and which I was able to utilize to make me a 'very' knowledgeable, 'very' engaging and not nervous speaker. It also taught me the value of true constructive criticism.

3. Seek Balance

Equilibrium, or work-life balance as it is now referred, has always been important to me. Even as a staff pharmacist loving overtime, I would arrange meeting the needs of my department in a way that did not interfere with my social and religious activities which at the time were largely civic and community relations based. Thus, my bosses always knew

that if they asked, I would make sure that the job got done even if that meant starting it, going to my meeting and returning later to complete it.

Accommodation goes both ways though. If I was going to 'split' a shift to accommodate extra-curricular activities, I felt that demanding differentials which would not have been required if my needs were not interrupting the 'shift' was inappropriate. One must maintain one's own counsel. To that end, I have never agreed to perform a function I felt was either illegal or immoral even when asked or cajoled. It has more than once caused me grief and stress but I have never lost a night's sleep for lack of integrity.

In maintaining equilibrium, one must diversify one's interests. As mentioned previously, I was involved in civic activities. I also exercised almost daily, became a docent, took classes mostly in arts, attended the theater, travelled, socialized, got married, volunteered and pursued various interests as they came and went. The rounding out of your personality, no matter what you pursue, enables you to relate on a more personal level to more people which in turn makes you a better professional.

4. Find Fulfillment in Your Work

By now, it must be obvious that I found my career **fulfilling**. Fulfillment is something that one must take responsibility for alone. We all have tasks that are less interesting, less stimulating or frankly more boring that need to be done. As I often tell students, "nobody hires you because they are feeling generous that day and want to part with however much money they agree to pay you. They hire you to do a job they need done. It is up to us to bring the right attitude." Sometimes I had challenging assignments or projects. Sometimes I had interesting projects. Sometimes I had downright boring tasks and sometimes I came to work 'not in the mood.' We all have those days. But, if you look for growth opportunities even when they don't seem likely, you can change the mundane into a

dynamic task. While performing one such task routinely, I pursued it as an opportunity to meet new people, learn about other aspects of the global operation, see old friends, or challenge my metrics (find more, work faster, change the order of units.)

Though I've been blessed with a host of various and diverse opportunities, I must admit that overall, the most fulfilling for me was when I was able to talk to patients either one on one or by leading a cardiac group or mental health group to help patients understand what their medications can do for them. I also enjoy teaching professionals how to think about a disease state and its therapy. Therefore, though I retired from my fulltime job, I still maintain my license and continue to teach in pharmacy. I plan to continue this until something else has a higher priority.

5. Make Yourself Useful

As mentioned earlier, nobody hires you without having something they need you to do. I have always felt that I should aspire to be more than **useful**. Not only should one get the job done, but one should go the extra mile to get it done very well. By doing a job well, you enhance your skills and your self-esteem. It's a twofer. For a professional, a job description is a starting point, not the sum total of all that needs or can be done. Challenge yourself to be more useful by recognizing a deficit and replacing it with a solution. Whether it was a newsletter we didn't have but needed (which I started in two different settings) or a patient group I developed and lead or becoming part of the ethics team, my 'usefulness' extended beyond the job description.

6. Love What You Do

Finally, **love** what you do. I was very blessed to have a portfolio before my retirement that felt tailor made to my skills and interests. I was involved in medication safety, lecturing, pharmacy practice, education and leadership. But even in the trying times and there were many, love the fact that you can pay your bills, that you have a career and that you aren't the patient in bed

462 or 1137 or 6659.

In summary, be grateful for openings where you can make a difference and enhance the organization. Realizing that my actions not only reflected on me but often were the image of pharmacy and pharmacists coming along with me and after me inspired my activities, and when asked to fulfill a pharmacist role, to say yes. Fulfillment came with recognizing and merging the organization's unmet needs with my talents. And of course, having a balance and a network provides the support especially when everything is not 'rosy'.



Jody Jacobson Wedret most recent position was as the Pharmacy Education Specialist and Clinical Professor at UCI where she had various roles in the pharmacy department for 25 years. Professor Wedret is frequently invited to speak at physician staff continuing education meetings as well as to address pharmacy and nursing groups. Professor Wedret also enjoys educating patients and the public so that they understand the purpose of prescriptions, understand disease process and corresponding treatments. Professor Jacobson Wedret is the author of 2 books and several articles. She has been involved in writing national guidelines and professional statements. In her spare time, she enjoys art, travel, reading, and being a docent for several historic venues. She is currently an emeritus docent at the Getty Center.