

Using Our Earthly Endeavors to Serve Patients, Student Pharmacists, and God

By Cortney M. Mospan, PharmD



Introduction

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16 ESV

As a community pharmacist, it can be challenging at times to remain patient, polite, and show grace to patients that we may encounter in practice. With the evolution of pharmacy practice, there has been an increase in the pharmacist’s exposure to interpersonal communications. Community pharmacists have frequently expressed feeling like the “face of the entire healthcare system” and are the bearer of patients’ frustrations as the first health care provider a patient will see when he or she has a problem.^{1,2}

It is estimated that 1.5 million Americans experience homelessness each year, and these patients are often complex, challenging, and lack access to appropriate care.^{3,4,5} This

presents an immense opportunity for pharmacists to live out their faith in practice as a domestic ministry and mission in our communities. Homeless patients have previously reported the impact of feeling as though there is a provider who truly cares for them, allows them to be honest, and assists them in navigating the healthcare system. With a decreased life expectancy of 30 years compared to the general population, these patients are a population that can immensely benefit from the care of a pharmacist.⁴

Many healthcare professional students and residents have found value in experiential learning in caring for patients who may be homeless, migrant workers, or have other contributing factors to define them as underserved.^{3,5} Exposing student pharmacists to caring for these populations during Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experiences (APPEs) develops their ability to solve challenges in counseling patients with cultural or language differences, increases their awareness of financial burdens of chronic conditions along with increasing awareness in how to overcome them, and refines their ability to make patients feel comfortable sharing details of their personal lives while minimizing stereotypes.⁵ The value of this experience is not limited to student pharmacists; medical residents in an Emergency Department have also supported the value of learning to care for homeless patients in their training, as it is frequently overlooked in didactic education. These residents developed an ethos of service while also finding a sense of value in being part of the safety-net. There is no denying caring for these patients is often challenging, but provides an immense sense of satisfaction.⁵

Gaining Access to Medications

ETSU Charitable Pharmacy was developed as a joint effort between the Colleges of Pharmacy and Nursing at East Tennessee State University. The aim of this pharmacy was to provide medications to the uninsured, homeless, and indigent patient populations in the Johnson City, TN community. The local health system, Mountain States Health Alliance (MSHA) generously provided a grant to support initial operations of ETSU Charitable Pharmacy.

To supplement the medications that the pharmacy could afford to purchase, ETSU Charitable Pharmacy contracted with the Dispensary of Hope (DOH). This is a fully-licensed, charitable, medication distributor that supplies medications from manufacturers and providers to charitable pharmacies and clinics serving the poor and underserved.⁶ The pharmacy was able to significantly increase the number of medications stocked, which the pharmacy would otherwise be unable to afford.

In addition to stocking dispensary of hope medications, pharmacists also coordinated the availability of sample medications from drug manufacturers and assisted primary care providers in accessing medications via Patient Assistance Programs. Community partnerships are also a huge opportunity for medication access. Several providers in the community have allowed ETSU Charitable Pharmacy to request samples on their behalf, or have donated samples for use by the pharmacy. Our local health system has also graciously donated insulin when formulary changes occur. In the first six months of operations, we were able to care for over 700 patients filling nearly 5000 prescriptions.

Blessing Others through Your Work

As a community pharmacist, there is an immense opportunity to serve patients with a godly perspective. In no other area does a healthcare provider have as many touches with patients to impact not only their health, but also their lives. During my residency, I served at two free clinics that provided health care to uninsured and homeless patients. It was through these experiences I realized not only how rewarding it was to care for these populations, but saw the opportunity I had to impact both patients and the mindset of student pharmacists in how they viewed and cared for these marginalized patients. Realizing the potential to use my practice every day as a mission, here are some lessons I try to keep in mind.

The Fred Factor is an impactful book that describes the true story of a mailman who used his passion for serving others in his daily work—a job that many of us may view as mundane. *Wake up each day intending to change the world.* This may seem audacious, biting off too much, or unrealistic, but waking up each day with a smile and giving people a little extra of your time can slowly start to change the way we all approach interpersonal relationships in a busy society.⁸ By taking a personal interest in our patients, especially those who often feel pushed aside, we can start to make a difference for those patients. You can make them feel like the loved children of God that they are. Each day, I think if I am adding or taking away from the experience of my patients, students, and colleagues. Having a spirit of service, innovation, and commitment can completely change the mindset and attitude of patients whose circumstances often makes their care challenging.⁸

Serving as a pharmacist in a charitable pharmacy with a heavy emphasis on service-learning and experiential learning for a college of pharmacy, there is an immense opportunity to shape future leaders and to develop a sense of servant leadership. In my experience, one of the biggest needs of the patients I serve is they simply need for someone to listen, someone who they feel cares and makes them feel valued. Listen to the hearts that God has put into your life: as pharmacists, we often feel

an immense desire to fix things, which results in us briefly listening before jumping into action.⁹ When we accept Christ, all of our pursuits and drivers shift from a self-centered approach to being others-centered. If we fully embrace this as pharmacists, we enhance the impact we can have on others. Blessings will increase in our lives and our patients' lives if we live with passion for the lives we were created to live.⁹ Use your influence as a pharmacist to genuinely love the patients God has placed in your pharmacy, especially patients who struggle the most to access care. Your career will be the most fulfilling when you use every ability God has given you to be the best you can be, regardless of where you practice.⁹

Finally, we all face struggles in our practice: busy schedules, high volume, challenging patients, etc., but we should be changed by the gospel in the way we approach these challenges. Our faith should affect the way in which we work.¹⁰ In Genesis, we see work as a part of paradise before the fall, and God has continued to use our daily work as a way to advance his kingdom. God has given us the talents that we have as pharmacists to accomplish not only what he desires for us, but what he desires for others. Our work is a place where God molds and refines us, as well as a tool God uses to remind us that he cares about our work—the services we offer, the companies we work for, and the patients we care for. How exciting is it that God is caring for his children and renewing his world through our work as pharmacists?⁹

As pharmacists, we are uniquely positioned to use our work as a daily mission field. Embrace the opportunity God has given you to love, serve, and impact others.

Make each day your masterpiece. John Wooden †

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Until They Know – **We are Sancocho** by Meghan Roddy, Pharm.D.



Meet Brad Jenkins, the founder of *Until They Know* (UTK). UTK is a mission organization in the heart of Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. UTK was officially founded in 2011, though the founders have been involved since May of 2008. This is the mission statement of UTK: *Until They Know exists to assist the church in its efforts to proclaim the message of the Gospel of Christ and encourage sustainability for individuals and communities by developing biblical community*. I can attest first hand to UTK's commitment to developing communities.

Community and relationships are what matters in the Dominican Republic.

Relationships are so important that the first phrase I learned upon landing in the Dominican Republic was "Somos sancocho". Somos sancocho literally translates to "We are soup" in English. Sancocho is a soup designed for family gatherings and celebrations. Each family in a community will bring something to put in the sancocho pot – meat, vegetables or spices – and it is all thrown into one pot, like what we call "gumbo" in Louisiana. There is always something for everyone to enjoy in sancocho. UTK uses the sancocho tradition and meaning and applies it to their community-building ministry. Everyone has something from God to offer such as abilities, talents and spiritual gifts. Each person brings what he or she has and adds it to the community of God, and everyone benefits from the unity of all believers coming together. Here is one way that UTK is helping build Godly communities:

While I was in the Dominican Republic, I visited many villages as part of a medical team to serve those in need of medical attention. The first village we visited

was Munoz, and when we arrived in the village, we saw this scene below. Many of us were hesitant to purchase anything from them until Brad told us about them. That is when I learned that UTK is involved in micro financing businesses in the Dominican Republic.

Micro financing businesses is a way that UTK helps the Dominican Republic in a powerful way. It empowers and gives

