

THE Tablet

SPRING 2025 | ADVOCACY | BRITISH COLUMBIA PHARMACY

Congratulations to the 2025 award winners!

Join us in recognizing nine
pharmacists and two pharmacy
students PAGE 8



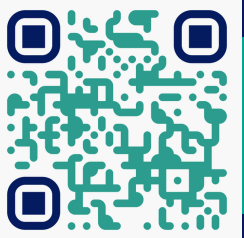
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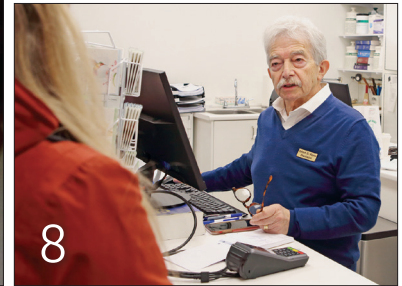
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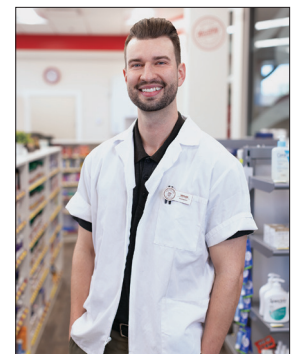
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ON THE COVER

Taylor Reitmeier, recipient of the 2025 Ben Gant Innovative Practice Award. Reitmeier works as pharmacy manager at Central Drugs Colville in Nanaimo.



Colleen Hogg

Congratulations to our 11 award winners

In this edition of *The Tablet*, we are honouring nine outstanding pharmacists and two future pharmacists. Throughout the pages, you will read profiles of their achievements and also find QR codes that will link to each of their awards videos.

As a member of the awards selection committee, I know we had many amazing nominations this year.

Our award recipients are more than just pharmacists.

They are individuals who supported First Nations clients during the Canada Post strike, ensuring vital medications and special dietary needs reached elders. They have welcomed Syrian refugee families, not just with interpreting services and airport assistance, but by opening their homes for Christmas dinners. They have taken the initiative to learn American Sign Language to better serve the deaf community. They have left vacations early to return for company audits. And when wildfires tore through their communities, they were the last to leave and the first to return, making sure residents had access to life-saving medications.

Going through the applications is always one of the highlights of my year because it allows us to stop and reflect on our profession. We're all busy in the day-to-day delivery of care to patients. However, seeing the letters of support from patients who've been impacted by their local pharmacist reminds me of why we went into this profession.

In this issue, you will also read about how the Association and pharmacy groups from across the province organized a Pharmacy Day at the Legislature on May 1, just ahead of the Annual Conference. This event featured a pop-up pharmacy set up in Victoria's Parliament Building, where Members of the Legislative Assembly and the public were invited to visit to learn about pharmacy services, including pharmacy primary care clinics, immunization services, point-of-care testing, delivery of rural health-care and more.

It was a massive effort involving dozens of individual pharmacists, students, company representatives and Association staff members, and we could not have done it without the hard work of everyone involved, and our members who are in the communities providing these services every day. **T**



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Geraldine Vance

Tariffs, a new Prime Minister, and the impact on provincial health

People will look back on 2025 as a time of change and uncertainty.

The unpredictable actions of U.S. President Donald Trump have put a great strain on Canada as a whole, affecting many sectors, including pharmacy. Here in Canada, we have a new Prime Minister who will need to work to uphold our country's sovereignty, while minimizing the negative economic impacts of tariffs. Provincially, these elements of uncertainty lay on top of the provincial government's challenge of absorbing all these economic threats.

For the profession, what we know is that there will be a new federal Minister of Health — the existing Minister did not get re-elected; that the current national PharmaCare program will continue, but not be expanded; and that U.S. tariffs on pharmaceuticals are likely. We also know that our provincial Ministry of Health is reviewing all expenditures, and has implemented a hiring freeze and a hold on new expenditures. There is also a big focus on dealing with rural emergency room closures and health human resources in general. At both the federal and provincial levels, dollars are tight and new initiatives are unlikely to proceed until U.S. tariff issues are resolved.

How does all of this shake out for community pharmacists in B.C.?

In recent years, pharmacists have clearly shown how they fill gaps in primary care efficiently and cost-effectively. Our Premier and Minister of Health are engaged and supportive of pharmacists.

And, as we saw at our recent Pharmacy Day at the Legislature, our political decision makers are keen to know more about the role pharmacists can play in dealing with so many of the challenges in our health-care system.

The Minor Ailments and Contraceptive Services program's success is the clearest demonstration of why pharmacists' scope of practice should continue to be expanded to include prescribing for stable chronic diseases.

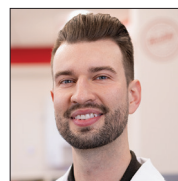
We know that when pharmacists do more of what they are trained and able to do, community care gets better. It makes good sense that in tight economic times, we should ensure pharmacists are working to their maximum expertise.

While there is no doubt that the profession is navigating in troubling times, the BC Pharmacy Association is clear on the work we need to do: get fair compensation for existing and new services.

These things will not come easily during the current times. But our efforts will continue to be to support pharmacists and pharmacies across the province. **T**

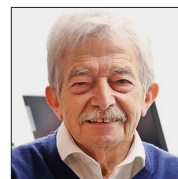
The Tablet asks our contributors:

In light of receiving a 2025 Pharmacy Excellence Award, what are you most appreciative for?



Taylor Reitmeier is the pharmacy manager at Central Drugs Colville in Nanaimo. "The peers I work with, everyone else who works hard to make

the impact to our community here. I'm doing it for them and for the patients. I can't take all the credit. I'm really just part of a bigger team that's working towards a common goal, and I am happy to be able to be a part of it."



Safouh El Rayes is the owner and pharmacy manager of Point Grey Pharmacy in Vancouver. "I'm so grateful for my parents who always

emphasized education, my wife, and my children who always supported me. I'm grateful for my patients who trust me and make my life beautiful. I appreciate life and I appreciate this country. I'm the luckiest pharmacist in the world, and I wish everyone in the profession and everyone around the world could feel this feeling."



Maricor Del Rosario is the pharmacy manager at Save-On-Foods #987. "I am so thankful to my whole staff — Wilfred, Jedda, Jill, Linabel, Sarah,

Shauna and Bright — I would not survive a day at work without you. All the nurses in the mental health unit in our hospital, the mental health clinic in Williams Lake, Lori and Sheila from Three Corners Health, and Kim, the new nurse practitioner; and everyone in the dialysis unit — it's amazing how you help our patients. And my Save-On Family, the head office, I really need to thank them. Chi, Bless, Allen, Livia and Gary, for the support they have provided me."

Adapting for Tomorrow — 2025 Annual Conference

This year's annual conference was held from May 1 to 3 in Victoria, British Columbia as a three-day in person event, with an option for members to tune in virtually. More than 250 joined us in person at the Delta Hotels Victoria Ocean Pointe Resort, plus an additional 400 who registered virtually.

The theme of the 2025 conference was Adapting for Tomorrow, a nod to recent changes in scope and the promises of the future, the profession's flexibility to these changes, and its ability to mold itself to fit the modern health-care landscape.

Our conference featured an opening from the Songhees Nation, a discussion on artificial intelligence, a panel on government relations, updates from the Minister of Health and the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Pharmaceutical, Laboratory and Blood Services Division, a session with the new Dean of UBC's Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, and much more.

If you missed the live conference, sessions will be made available later through the Association's eTraining portal at bcpharmacy.ca/education/etraining. **1**

1. Government Relations Panel session: Bill Tieleman, Katrine Conroy, Sonia Furstenau and Todd Stone.

2. BCPhA CEO Geraldine Vance at the podium. 3. Attendees in the audience.

4. BCPhA registration desk at conference.

5. Lekwungen Traditional Dancers' opening ceremony.



BCPhA hosts Pharmacy Day at the Legislature

On May 1, 2025, dozens of delegates from the BC Pharmacy Association visited B.C.'s Legislative Assembly to showcase the work of community pharmacists and what more pharmacists can do for British Columbians.

Sponsored by B.C.'s Minister of Health, the Hon. Josie Osborne, the event included a mock pharmacy with stations on point-of-care testing for strep throat, dispensing and adaptations, pharmacy primary care clinics, rural care and immunizations. Members explained the role of B.C.'s community pharmacists and what government decision-makers could do to advance the practice and business of community pharmacy in British Columbia.

The event was attended by dozens of Members of the Legislative Assembly, both in government and in the opposition, and included a visit from Premier David Eby and other cabinet ministers. Additionally, the Association organized one-on-one meetings with MLAs and political staff from the Premier's Office.

A huge thank you to all of our members who attended to provide support for this exciting advocacy day. **T**

More photos available at bcpharmacy.ca/pharmacy-day



Premier David Eby (centre, in suit) with the BC Pharmacy delegation at the Legislature.

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Safouh El Rayes, pharmacist and owner of Point Grey Pharmacy, is the recipient of the 2025 Excellence in Patient Care Award.

Scan here to see Safouh El Rayes' award video!



Honouring Pharmacy Excellence

Each year the BC Pharmacy Association's Awards Committee reviews nominations from all across British Columbia to select the best and brightest of the profession to recognize. In 2025, the Committee selected nine award winners, and additionally two recipients who are pharmacy students in the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences are being recognized.

Safouh El Rayes

EXCELLENCE IN PATIENT CARE AWARD

TITLE Pharmacy Manager & Owner
WORKPLACE Point Grey Pharmacy
LOCATION Vancouver, B.C.

Breakfast — Cereal. One banana. Twelve walnuts.

At half-past six in the morning, pharmacist Safouh El Rayes prepares for the day. By quarter to seven, he has packed his lunch — artisan walnut, cream cheese, and sliced avocado. Fuel.

Originally from Syria, El Rayes studied pharmacy in Italy before moving to Canada in 1975. He began his career as a pharmacy assistant at London Drugs and, over the next 17 years, rose to operations manager for British Columbia and Alberta. In 1992, he purchased Point Grey Pharmacy in Vancouver, where he's served as proprietor since.

He reaches the double-glass doors of his store by 7:45 a.m. By the time the first customer walks through the door at 9 a.m., El Rayes is beaming.

"We open the store — people walk in and I'm so happy to see them. We'll chat. Sometimes they walk in just to have a conversation, and to tell us what is happening in their day. I love people, and we pharmacists are so lucky to have our patients come to visit us," he said.

El Rayes has always surrounded himself with people. He grew up in a family of eight siblings, and some of his fondest childhood memories include running through the neighbourhood to ask what each of his neighbours was having for lunch or dinner. He made lists and repeated the process daily.

"It's the same for my customers. I love them and I am grateful that they are going out of their way to come to my pharmacy. In return, I always want to make sure they are receiving the best care, the right prescriptions, and that they understand their medications," he said.

His patients love him for it, too. No fewer than 42 patients, colleagues, physicians and community members wrote letters supporting his 2025 Pharmacy Excellence Award nomination. They shared stories about how he personally delivers medications to patients, how he welcomed a refugee family into his home for Christmas dinner,



Above: Safouh El Rayes (third from left) with his supporters and pharmacy team at Point Grey Pharmacy.

how he keeps spare belongings for seniors at his pharmacy in case they lock themselves out of their homes, and how he uses his keen memory to recall patients' medication profiles and personal details about their lives.

"It's the people who give me energy; it's the environment and it's our staff that make the difference. And when your team looks at you, and they see how you treat every patient as if they are a friend, as if they are a family member. that's how the whole team will also treat every patient."

A year before the pandemic, the lease for El Rayes' pharmacy expired, and the property owner decided to sell the building. El Rayes chose to relocate the pharmacy to an available unit next door. After an eight-month application and permitting process with the city, he received approval.

By then, it was almost Christmas.

"We had so much stuff in the old store, and I wasn't sure how I would move it all. One of my customers started helping me advertise a sale — soaps, shampoos, makeup, small items for Christmas presents," he said. "People were filling their arms. It gave me again the impression that Canadians are amazing and reminds me why I love this country so much."

The coming year, 2026, will mark his 50th year practicing pharmacy in British Columbia. Much has changed in that time — not just in the pharmacist's scope of practice, but also in the culture of today's world, and the tools available in modern pharmacy practice.

"The younger generation of pharmacists are lucky because the scope of the profession has changed completely. The sky is the limit," El Rayes said. "It's a revolution, and patients are starting to recognize us as essential health-care providers. They come to us at the pharmacy before going to the doctor."

El Rayes radiates boundless energy. He speaks with his hands, his eyes widen, and his eyebrows rise when he emphasizes words. And he is not going anywhere — having recently renewed his lease for the next five years.

"I always had this dream to open my own pharmacy, and people would feel comfortable knocking on my door, seeking advice when they couldn't reach their doctor. That dream became reality when I found Point Grey Pharmacy, which welcomed me into one of the most special communities I've ever known," he said. "I'm so grateful for my parents who always emphasized education, my wife, and my children who always supported me. I'm grateful for my patients who trust me and make my life beautiful. I'm the luckiest pharmacist in the world." **T**

CONGRATULATIONS!



We would like to Congratulate Taylor Reitmeier along with all of the BCPHA award winners! Your dedication to patient care is truly inspiring.

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Taylor Reitmeier

BEN GANT INNOVATIVE PRACTICE AWARD

TITLE Pharmacy Manager
WORKPLACE Central Drugs Colville
LOCATION Nanaimo, B.C.

When pharmacist Taylor Reitmeier was offered the opportunity to manage his own pharmacy, the first step he took was to reach out to the surrounding health-care practices to ask, how could he help?

“I want to be helpful. I want to be enthusiastic. I want to be motivating. I want to be a facilitator,” he said. “If it seems like there’s something that isn’t as smooth as it could be, or there’s a hiccup or missing piece in care, I ask if there is something I can do to help make the lives of everyone involved easier, for not only the patient but their health providers.”

A 2016 graduate of the University of British Columbia’s pharmacy program, Reitmeier knew immediately that he wanted to work for the Central Drugs Ltd. team on Vancouver Island. He had worked for the company before during his first practicum experience in school, and found himself drawn to the company’s locally owned, independent pharmacy model. After working for a few years at several of Central Drugs’ seven locations, he was given the opportunity to manage the company’s newest store, Central Drugs Colville.

The Colville location is on the first-floor of a medical building, just across the street from the Nanaimo Regional General Hospital. One of the neighbouring clinics is operated by an obstetrician-gynecologist, Dr. Regina-Maria Renner, and the pair began a working relationship early on, just as pharmacists were being enabled to assess and prescribe for contraception.

“She is a wealth of knowledge when it comes to women’s health and contraception and I thought it was worth seeing if she would be willing to meet with our company, with all our pharmacists, so we could all benefit from her knowledge,” he said.

After this introduction, Reitmeier later met Carolyn Patience, the clinical nurse leader for gynecology in the operating room, at the hospital.

“At the Nanaimo hospital, they were looking to solve a logistical issue of having intrauterine devices available in the hospital that they could use



Scan here to see
Taylor Reitmeier's
award video!



on an urgent, or last-minute basis,” Reitmeier said.

“We have delivery drivers and we’re close by, so we’re able to replace their stock and have that always available for their patients. Since B.C. is now covering all contraception through PharmaCare, us being involved takes that barrier off the table in making sure there is enough supply available for patients doing these procedures.”

In the neighbourhood is also an Island Health mental health outpatient psychiatry service, which the pharmacy dispenses medications for. Reitmeier learned that the mental health centre could use some help in administering long-acting anti-psychotic medications for some of their clients. He had previously received training to administer injections not just in the deltoid site, but also the ventrogluteal site, and he offered to help.

“If the patient lives close by, why don’t we see if they would be comfortable coming to the pharmacy and seeing me for the injection?” he said. “I started getting more clients that came to get these injections from me. It’s exciting. I felt I was doing something new and it was another opportunity to develop stronger relationships with these patients, and soon I started seeing positive changes for a lot of them, and they also seemed more com-

Ben Gant Innovative Practice Award recipient Taylor Reitmeier (in white) is known for building relationships with those around him.



fortable to have these done at the pharmacy.”

Other health providers around his pharmacy include an allergist, an orthopedic surgeons’ office, and a family practice clinic. Reitmeier’s approach is no different for each of these neighbours.

“For our allergist upstairs, I special order allergy serums for their patients, and for the orthopedic surgeons, I keep a lot of cortisone shots in stock, and since we’re so close to the hospital, we do cast boot fittings and have a few other orthopedic related braces,” he said.

As for what’s to come, currently, Reitmeier has been working with his colleagues in women’s health to identify gaps in coverage for First Nations clients.

“This would include some products that are used during medical abortions that are not currently covered. We’re working with the gynecology office to make those products available and dealing with some exceptional coverage, but what we’re hoping to do is have an easier and smoother process that can be used across the province,” he said.

Reitmeier attributes his motivation to help others to his love for conversation, and how nurturing those conversations seems to open up opportunities professionally. Without striking up conversations with those around him, he believes he may have missed some of these chances to help.

And unsurprisingly, it was the act of conversing — specifically, the way pharmacists spoke with their patients, that drew Reitmeier to the profession in the first place.

He first noticed it during a job-shadowing opportunity in high school.

“That’s what struck me, the conversations. They knew the pharmacist by name and trusted him with their health and their children’s health. I’ve always found the most important part of my interactions with patients was developing those relationships, taking the time to sit down, sometimes just giving them someone to talk to, to provide context for what they’re going through, and what their expectation of care might be,” he said.

It’s why he takes the extra time to get to know others. Not only do those interactions result in positive outcomes for his practice and for his patients’ health, he also just really enjoys meeting and getting to know people.

“I have seen major successes with patients who I built a relationship with. If I lean into and take that extra time to build that rapport and that relationship with the patient, they’re more forthcoming about any issues that they have, and often, they’re more optimistic about their condition,” Reitmeier said.

“I want to engage with patients and empower them to take control of their health care and take advantage of all the opportunities and resources available to them. So that is what I’ve tried to build into my practice, and I continue to look for opportunities to be helpful, to be a facilitator.” **T**



Linda Gutenberg, pharmacy operations lead at Heart Pharmacy Group, is the recipient of the 2025 Pharmacy Leadership Award.

Linda Gutenberg PHARMACY LEADERSHIP AWARD

TITLE Pharmacy Operations Lead
WORKPLACE Heart Pharmacy Group
LOCATION Victoria, B.C.

In four decades of practice, pharmacist Linda Gutenberg has worked in nearly every role in community pharmacy.

She's been on the frontlines, dispensing and providing clinical services — whether at the counter, in central fill pharmacies, or out in the community working directly with patients. She led more than 500 staff across dozens of stores as a director of pharmacy, while managing millions of dollars in medications, handling the logistics of individual pharmacies, and overseeing documentation, software changes and workflows. She has held leadership positions in advocacy bodies, working to advance the profession for thousands of pharmacists.

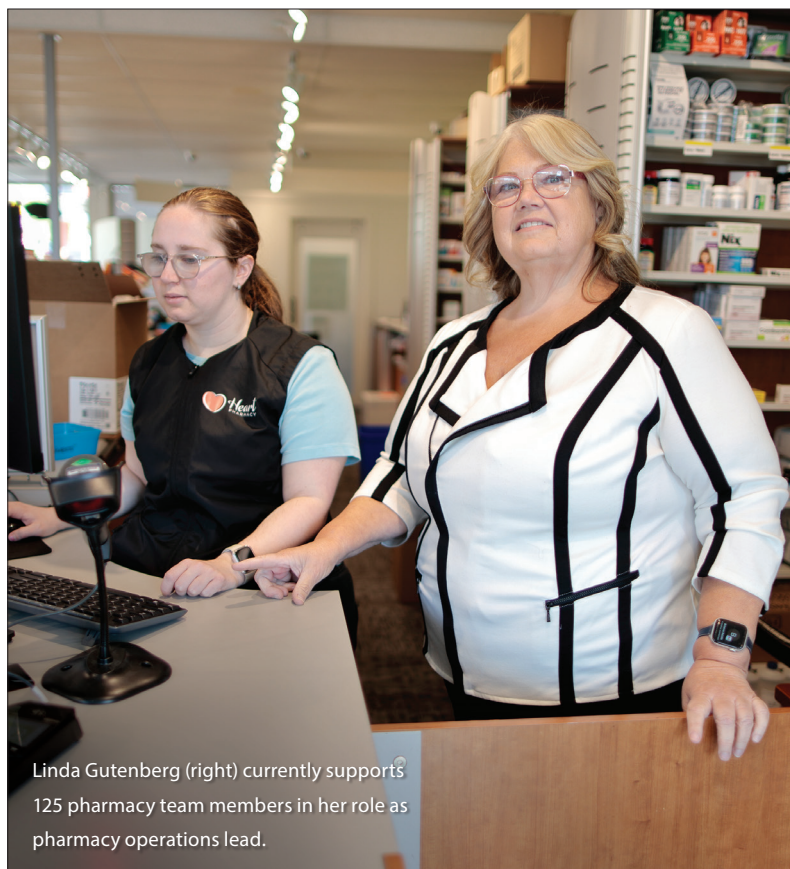
"My passion for pharmacy has never wavered. I want to help move the profession forward and remove barriers for implementation of new services and new scopes of practice. That continues to be my driving force today," Gutenberg said.

She was earmarked for leadership early on. In one of her first roles as a pharmacy manager for the Strom Group on Vancouver Island, she was seen as a leader among other store managers, and she took a key role in providing strategy and direction for the group. When that group became part of the Rexall Pharmacy Group a few years later, Gutenberg was elevated to a Regional Pharmacy Manager position, overseeing 28 corporate stores in British Columbia. And in her next role, as Director of Pharmacy with Forewest Holdings Inc., she helped grow the group from nine stores to 37 stores — all the while still making time to work at the dispensary counter.

"Throughout my career, I have noticed different styles of leadership. I did not want to be the type of leader who is providing direction for what should be happening in pharmacies, while not being there in the stores," she said.

"I think working alongside our team members in the pharmacy lends a different level of credibility. Whether I was a district manager or regional manager, I was still dispensing. I wanted to make sure I was experiencing all the changes and realities that our pharmacy teams experience."

In the past 40 years, the profession has changed a lot, and pharmacies are no longer seen as solely dispensaries of medication. In addition to leading pharmacy teams through changes to the profession, Gutenberg has always



Linda Gutenberg (right) currently supports 125 pharmacy team members in her role as pharmacy operations lead.

sought opportunities to be part of the change process.

Collectively, she has spent more than 13 years representing community pharmacists as a Director of the Board at the BC Pharmacy Association, including serving as its president from 2002 to 2003. Additionally, she served as the Deputy CEO of the Association from 2018 to 2019.

“When I went to school, we worked on the premise that the perfect world would be where the doctor diagnosed the condition, and the pharmacist decided which medication would be best for the patient, whether the dose needs to be altered, and monitoring the patient’s response to the physician’s diagnosis,” Gutenberg said.

“That vision was from 1986. Today, we have made progress but we’re still not quite there; and maybe what we have is a bit different from what we envisioned. We’re now able to diagnose on our own with minor ailments, and we can now adapt prescriptions and better determine what medication is going to be best for the patient.”

Currently, Gutenberg works as Pharmacy Operations Lead with the Heart Pharmacy Group, a group of nine pharmacies on Vancouver Island. Here, she serves as clinical lead for the group’s vaccine program, which provides tens of thousands of vaccines each year from Port Hardy to Victoria. Additionally, she supports about 125 staff members, among them pharmacists, nurses, home care aides, technicians and assistants.

“We have a fantastic group of pharmacists who are all passionate about moving the profession forward. But many of us have different specialties or passions for one area of practice or the other,” she said.

“My role is to help figure out what area of pharmacy practice each of our staff are most passionate about, and help them channel their passion by removing any barriers that are stopping them from doing that.”

One strategy Gutenberg has adopted to deliver a more effective vaccine campaign is by utilizing changes, implemented by B.C. government in 2022, that enabled pharmacies to claim PharmaCare’s administration fee for vaccines administered by nurses. This change allowed Gutenberg to free up her pharmacists during the busy vaccine season.

“A question that came up was, how do we find nurses that want to work shifts inside a pharmacy? Fortunately, we had a network of nurses in our daily medication management program, and we worked with them to identify colleagues who wanted to supplement their hours at the hospital or in long-term care,” she said.

“This past year is the third year we have had nurses administering vaccines. We did about 65,000 vaccines among our nine stores.”

Looking ahead, she believes pharmacists should build upon the foundation of recent scope expansions, such as prescribing, by continuing to implement these services within community practice. She said pharmacists should also keep an eye on the horizon for plausible future services based on the changing health-care landscape.

“For example, pharmacists now have the authority to order lab tests, but the payment model for that has not been established. We are thinking about it now, because once we do have a payment method, we want to be ready to go,” Gutenberg said.

She also remains optimistic that British Columbia will adopt electronic-prescribing. B.C. remains one of the only places in Canada which has not adopted e-prescribing, in which prescribers send prescriptions directly from their electronic records to the pharmacy.

“I was involved in a committee to implement e-prescribing in 2005 and there was a strong willingness to have it happen, but unfortunately there were too many problems with implementation at the time,” Gutenberg said.

“I think the topic is now resurfacing and I’m excited at the potential of having it be implemented in B.C. and what it will mean for our pharmacy teams. I would love to see that happen here, certainly before I retire.” **T**



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Linda Gutenberg

Pharmacy Operations Lead

2025 *Pharmacist Leadership Award*



Megan St. John

St. Anthony's Pharmacy Manager

2024 *Murray Dykeman Mentorship Award*



Lindsay Dixon

Founder: Friendly Pharmacy 5

2021 *Ben Gant Innovative Practice Award*

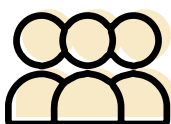


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Aydan Con (centre), pharmacist at London Drugs #10, poses with London Drugs team members. Con is one of the recipients of the 2025 New Practitioner Award.

Aydan Con NEW PRACTITIONER AWARD

TITLE Pharmacist
WORKPLACE London Drugs #10
LOCATION Vancouver, B.C.

Aydan Con grew up in the Vancouver community of Kerrisdale. His first job was as a cashier in a retail pharmacy near his home, the same pharmacy where the 2024 PharmD graduate now practices as a pharmacist specializing in clinical services.

As with many things in life, his decision to pursue pharmacy had much to do with timing.

“I lived in a neighbourhood by a London Drugs, and I know the care that I could receive at the store. I trusted it as a patient and as a community member, so I thought, as a first job, it would be a very safe place to try,” Con said.

“I knew when I graduated high school that I eventually wanted to go into health care, and as I was working there, I realized that it’s what I always wanted to do. So I applied to pharmacy school right at the beginning of COVID.”

This decision was a perfect match. During Con’s four years in pharmacy school, the profession’s scope of practice in British Columbia experienced an unprecedented expansion. Suddenly, pharmacists were administering the bulk of publicly funded vaccines, the scope for adaptations was broadly extended to cover most medications, pharmacists were enabled to assess and prescribe, and more recently, given the authority to order lab tests.

And here he was, a new pharmacy graduate with a mind brimming with the latest in pharmacy education, who grew up in the neighbourhood, and who, as his colleagues would discover, had the passion and humility for sharing his

fresh approach with more experience pharmacists.

“I will say I got very lucky, this is all happening right now,” Con said.

During his third-year of pharmacy school, his colleagues at London Drugs introduced him to the pharmacy’s internship program, where students were hired onto the team to accelerate their training to become pharmacists. He began taking on a growing portion of clinical services at the store, and soon, provided the majority of clinical services in the team.

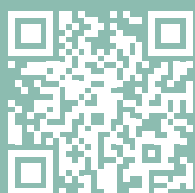
And because he grew up in the community, many patients already know him — including one of Con’s teachers from elementary school, now one of his regular patients.

“During school, I realized I wanted to provide that continuity of care where I see the patient every few weeks or months, to get to know them,” Con said. “And actually, one of my patients, my very first one that I met at my current London Drugs, I still see every few months or so. I’ve now met the kids, the grand kids, the whole family and I’ve learned their life story, and I think that’s really rewarding.”

Today, just months into his first year of practice, Con spends about 80 per cent of his time in the pharmacy performing minor ailment consultations, administering medications, consulting with family physicians, and providing other clinical services. He has even developed paper booklets of minor ailment checklists, medication review guides, and adaptation frameworks to help guide

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Brad Adams NEW PRACTITIONER AWARD

TITLE	Pharmacy Manager
WORKPLACE	Save-On-Foods Pharmacy #988
LOCATION	Vernon, B.C.

colleagues on providing the newer services.

And, perhaps as another nod to timing, a hypertension-management study he participated in during pharmacy school has now been picked up by London Drugs — with Con taking a lead role.

“During my second year, there was an opportunity to do a work-learn with the UBC Digital Emergency Medicine department, where we recruited patients in the emergency room and collected data to monitor their blood pressure from home,” Con said.

“They have now partnered with London Drugs for an expanded trial, and once it’s fully operational, I’ll be a pharmacist case manager monitoring blood pressure for a subset of patients at London Drugs, and making adaptations to their medication doses if needed, or consulting with the doctor to add or stop medications. It’s a pharmacist-led hypertension management piece.”

Surprisingly, Con’s background is in music. Throughout high school, he had competed nationally as a pianist and later decided to pursue a dual-degree program in both chemistry and music.

“In some ways, my music training informs my pharmacy practice more than anything else, because in classical music, we’re looking to innovate within some fairly fixed rules, and we have to seek to innovate within the bounds of these rules and create new interpretations,” he said.

“When we look at medication management, there are black and white rules, too, but what are the other things where we can innovate in managing medications to improve the patient’s health outcomes? I knew I picked the right field, because it really ties in all that musical training that I have into a health profession. It’s like a match made in heaven.”

It’s this love for music that continues to inspire him to be the best pharmacist possible. And also his love for his wife, a woman he initially met in music school, and who first encouraged him to apply for a job at London Drugs. She is also training to become a pharmacist and is in the UBC PharmD class of 2025.

“A lot of my inspiration comes from her. She has Type 1 diabetes but she can do everything I can do despite managing a chronic disease. There is no excuse for me not to do everything I can do to the best of my ability,” Con said.

“In music, we’re always taught to strive for the unattainable perfection, and I think that carries me here in pharmacy. Because I will never be able to be the best pharmacist for everyone, but I want to be the best pharmacist I can be today, for the patients who are here now.” **T**

If there is time enough to lean, there is time enough to clean. It was an oft-repeated phrase in the restaurant where Brad Adams first learned the ethos of perfection and excellence, an ideal that defines how he continues to hold his work decades later.

The Salmon Arm native no longer works in a kitchen. Graduating with his Doctor of Pharmacy in 2022, Adams found himself entering his third career at the age of 43, with the hope that he would discover where he’s meant to be.

He had always found his own path. Growing up to an accountant father and an elementary school teacher mother, it was perhaps by chance that his first occupation was as a dishwasher at a restaurant owned by a top chef from Britain. Here, he discovered his passion for the kitchen, helped along by tales of cooking for royalty, of travels around the world, and of the possibilities a career in the culinary world could bring.

It didn’t take Adams long to become one of the top students in his culinary program at Malaspina College (now Vancouver Island University), and a practicum in one of B.C.’s top kitchens led to a full-time role at the Pan Pacific Hotel in Vancouver at age 18.

During his final two years, he earned a position at The Five Sails, the hotel’s five-diamond fine dining restaurant.

“There was a lot of pride in that. Most students don’t walk into a job like that right out of culinary school,” Adams said.

He continued to grow. Eventually, Adams was hired to be an executive sous chef, commanding a team of 120 people in a sprawling casino complex — in Moscow, Russia.

At the Vernon Village Green Save-On-Foods Pharmacy where he now works as pharmacy manager, Adams is still wearing his chef’s uniform: his white coat, his kitchen clogs; and the work is precise, requiring extreme accuracy and perfection, each step just as important as the last. Like in the kitchen.



Above: Brad Adams (centre), pharmacy manager at Save-On-Foods #988, poses with his pharmacy team for a photo. Adams is one of the recipients of the 2025 New Practitioner Award.

“Being a chef was a high effort, a high anxiety, and high-speed kind of career,” he said. “But even so, the risks and rewards are a little different when it comes to health care. They’re not leaving with a bad meal. The work must be taken seriously. It can make life-changing differences to people’s lives.”

Adams returned to Canada after six years in Russia. He wanted to be closer to family. His elder relatives were getting older, needing care, and it was time to come home. Back in B.C., he became a mortgage broker, driven by curiosity and a desire to build financial security in real estate. He committed fully like he had always done in the past, but something was missing.

“It’s a highly emotional thing for people buying properties,” he said. “I’d take on the emotional stress of the client, do the work, and clients would go back to their bank for a better rate — even after the bank had originally said no.”

The experience left him searching for a role where his effort made a lasting difference, where people truly respected and valued his support.

That desire brought him to pharmacy. Returning to university after more than 15 years was daunting. From learning to take notes again, learning how to compile study resource materials, to managing stress, he found support among students who wanted to learn collaboratively, and among professors who became mentors.

He found encouragement in faculty like Simon Albon.

“He genuinely wanted to know who I was,” Adams said. “Pharmacy school is like trying to drink from a fire hose, but Simon cared about making pharmacy school a supportive place, not just academically, but socially and emotionally, too. He wanted the university experience to be reflected on positively by his students.”

After receiving his PharmD, Adams accepted a position at Save-On-Foods pharmacy in Vernon, where he was quickly promoted to pharmacy manager. Under his management, Adams has been seeking opportunities to embrace the full scope of pharmacy services, and apply more clinical skills to everyday practice.

“During a practicum at Lakeside Pharmacy Kelowna, I learned the difference a great team of clinicians can make for patients. Though I’m now practicing somewhere else, I have tried to follow their mentorship in my practice. I still turn to the pharmacists at Lakeside when I need it,” Adams said.

Patients are often surprised to learn he is new in the profession, but despite his recent entry into practice, Adams has already sought opportunities to support the next generation of pharmacy professionals.

Students he has mentored attest to his ability to listen, and in his ability to turn small moments into teachable lessons. For the past year, he has also been teaching as a sessional instructor in the pharmacy technician program at Okanagan College.

“During my three years at Interior Health, I worked next to Richard Slavik. I always appreciated how he included me in clinical conversations and was generous in sharing his knowledge with me, even when I had some seriously dumb questions. I’m grateful for that, and I try to be that person for others now,” Adams said.

As for the future, Adams would like to grow. It may be his third career, but he believes, this time, he’d like to stay, at least for the time being.

“If pharmacy were a dish, it would be something deconstructed. Messy at times. Some components are tough to swallow on their own. But when it’s all put together, done right, it’s something truly valuable,” he said. **T**

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Maricor Del Rosario

COLLABORATIVE CARE AWARD

TITLE Pharmacy Manager
WORKPLACE Save-On-Foods Pharmacy #987
LOCATION Williams Lake, B.C.

Winning the trust of her community was an uphill battle for Maricor Del Rosario. At the age of 23, she was thrust into a staff pharmacist role at the Save-On-Foods Williams Lake store. Here, she was the youngest employee in the dispensary. The previous pharmacist had worked there for 15 years prior to her arrival.

“It was challenging to break the walls,” Del Rosario said. “I recall one time, a patient asked me if they could see the pharmacist, and they wouldn’t believe that I am the pharmacist. My assistants are all born-and-raised in Williams Lake and I could see they had this connection with the patients that I hadn’t seen anywhere else in bigger cities like Vancouver or Surrey, or even Prince George.”

An international pharmacy graduate, Del Rosario arrived in Canada in 2004 after finishing pharmacy school in the University of the Philippines. She attended the International Pharmacy Program in University of Toronto in 2005. She’s been with the Save-On-Foods team since, first receiving training in the Lower Mainland, then spending about four months practicing in Prince George, before relocating permanently to Williams Lake in 2006.

Being alone in a new community was difficult, but Del Rosario occupied her time by volunteering in seniors’ homes when she wasn’t at work. Otherwise, she spent her days in the pharmacy, even when she wasn’t scheduled.

At the time, one of the pharmacy’s goals was to win back a partnership with the local hospital’s dialysis unit. Del Rosario introduced herself to the nursing staff as the new pharmacist at Save-On-Foods, and began meeting with renal patients and reviewing their medications.

“This is how it all started. I would follow up with patients at home, I would engage the nurses, and they learned that I was someone who they could come and talk with right away about their patients’ medications,” Del Rosario said.



The effort paid off. She began recognizing her patients throughout town, and they saw her, too. They welcomed her as their new pharmacist. And when her husband from the Philippines also moved to Williams Lake, she felt like a part of the community.

“These patients, I started seeing them everywhere in town. It really is a small community. I was camping and there was this patient who was in the dialysis unit, and we happened to be camping in the same area. It was like I knew everyone,” Del Rosario said.

Del Rosario also began working closely with mental health and addictions services in the community, including a detoxification facility and several organizations providing care to Indigenous patients. These include the Three Corners Health Services Society, the Gateway Stabilization Unit, the Nenqayni Wellness Centre Society, and the Renner House.

“This topic is close to my heart because my brother went through the same thing. To see all these people try to overcome addiction, I always commend them,” Del Rosario said.



Maricor Del Rosario (centre), pharmacy manager at Save-On-Foods #987, poses for a photo with her pharmacy team. Del Rosario is the recipient of the 2025 Collaborative Care Award.

And because many of her patients are Indigenous Peoples, she has been working with their communities to help improve how information is communicated about Plan W covered medications. One of those initiatives resulted in all Plan W covered products being labelled with orange signs in her pharmacy for ease of recognition.

“I have loved starting all these relationships within the community,” she said. “We would go out to First Nations communities and do medication reviews. It takes a long time to earn their trust, but now I am able to discuss medications with them and to help them understand why their medications are needed. The impact to their health has been amazing.”

To her, there is no trick to collaboration beyond being genuine and caring in sharing her knowledge as a pharmacist with other health providers.

“If you’re collaborating with other health care professionals, you’re giving the patient the edge to be successful in achieving the best of their health,” Del Rosario said.

“I am so thankful to my whole staff — Wilfred, Jedda, Jill, Linabel, Sarah, Shauna and Bright — I would not survive a day at work without you. All the nurses in the mental health unit in our hospital, the mental health clinic in Williams Lake, Lori and Sheila from Three Corners Health, and Kim, the new nurse practitioner; and everyone in the dialysis unit — it’s amazing how you help our patients. And my Save-On Family, the head office, I really need to thank them. Chi, Bless, Allen, Livia and Gary, for the support they have provided me.

“They’re always there, and they treat us like family.” **T**

Aaron Sha BOWL OF HYGEIA AWARD

TITLE Associate Owner
WORKPLACE Shoppers Drug Mart #2256
LOCATION Prince Rupert, B.C.

“You’re the new pharmacist at Shoppers!”

Aaron Sha didn’t recognize the voice. It was the fall of 2022, towards the end of a shift spent as a relief pharmacist at Shoppers Drug Mart’s Prince Rupert location. Sha had initially accepted the opportunity out of a desire to explore B.C.’s north coast, drawn by memories of his earlier years practicing pharmacy, and reminders of how friendly people are in smaller Canadian cities and towns.

He arrived a week ago by plane. Prince Rupert Airport is located on an island just west of the city, itself a port on the mouth of the Skeena River, once known as the Halibut Capital of the world. Flights in-and-out of the area’s foggy, rainswept coastline are at best, unpredictable. It took the airline two tries over two days just to land.

Sha was with his wife Jessica, also a pharmacist, and during the week the pair met the pharmacy team, the existing associate owner of the store, hiked local trails, and rented a car to explore the nearby communities.

“Towards the end of our week in Prince Rupert, the associate owner took my wife and I out for dinner, and the waitress recognized us as the new pharmacists. I had just been here a week and people already know. Even though Prince Rupert has 10,000 people, when there’s someone new here — and when you provide a good service — they remember. I really got a sense that this was a close-knit community,” Sha said.

“I’ve worked in community pharmacy for years in the Lower Mainland, but I never really felt the community like this. This was different.”

As it turned out, the existing associate owner was planning to move away to the Lower Mainland and was looking for someone to take over the Prince Rupert location. It was an opportunity, and it didn’t take long for Sha to decide.

“The pharmacy team, the community, they all really gave me a good feeling about this town. I called back a week later, and my wife and I officially moved here in January of 2023, and we’ve been here ever since,” he said.

For the past two years, Sha has been a staple in Prince Rupert. Doctors and other health care providers in town are all just a cellphone call away. About half of his patients are members of the Lax Kw’alaams, Kitkatla and Hartley Bay First Nations communities, and he learned about their histories, the impact of colonialism on the people, and the generational trauma that many Indigenous patients continue to experience.

“We pharmacists wear a lab coat and we look like we’re from an institution. We speak a certain way, and this can prevent us from helping as much as we’d like to. I am learning how to communicate in a manner that’s respectful and I’m still learning — it’s a lifelong journey,” Sha said. “As outsiders, we use this term ‘Indigenous’, but there are many

different cultures, different bands, different remote villages, and they all have very unique needs that need to be met.”

As time passed, Sha’s connections to the community grew stronger. Other health providers in the community regularly seek his expertise in delivering culturally safe care. He provides training on medication administration for the local Children Matter Community Services. His pharmacy partnered with the local secondary school, Charles Hayes, and any students interested in a career in health care are always welcome to join his pharmacy for their work experience program.

The latest student even applied for a permanent position in Sha’s staff, and he’s hopeful the young local will go on and pursue a pharmacy degree.

“The first time I really felt that we were now a part of the community was when a woman came into our pharmacy. She wasn’t a regular patient, and she introduced herself as a teacher from the elementary school. She asked if my wife and I would like a tour of Prince Rupert,” Sha recalled. “So she picked us up after work and drove us everywhere in town, it felt like we were on a professional tour. She told us where a hidden restaurant was, where to find the best coffee, introduced us to all the local shops; that was probably about three months after we moved here.”

It hasn’t been easy work, however. Like many rural and remote communities in British Columbia, Prince Rupert has a shortage in health-care workers. Many doctors who lived and worked in the community just a few years ago have moved away, and often, Sha and his team would step in to become part of these patients’ new primary care team — something only recently possible with the pharmacists’ expanded scope in adaptations and minor ailments.

To keep the pharmacy open, Sha and his wife work opposite shifts.

“I often work 14-hour days, seven days a week, and it’s sometimes challenging. But it’s a very good feeling when you know the community needs you, and the community wants you here. I just wanted to return the favour,” he said.

An example of that need surfaced in November 2024 during the nationwide Canada Post strike, when the national mail carrier halted service for a month. Suddenly, Hartley Bay — one of three First Nations communities Sha serves — was cut off from the thrice-weekly Canada Post flights that supplied them.

The only way to access Hartley Bay is by flight

Right: Aaron Sha (left), Associate Owner of Shoppers Drug Mart #2256, poses for a photo with his pharmacy team.

Scan here to see
Aaron Sha's
award video!



or by sea. Concerned about the community’s access to medications, Sha began working on the challenge alongside Hartley Bay’s health director to find alternative transportation. The team partnered with a local authority figure in Hartley Bay and decided to privately charter their own flights.

“That was a really unique opportunity for a pharmacy to reach out and for us to step up. I think as pharmacists, we really care, and we wanted to step up and do this,” Sha said.

His work has made heads turn in the community, and Sha was nominated in the “Professional Excellence” category of the 2024 Prince Rupert Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards, the first time the event re-opened after the pandemic.

And when word got out that Sha was to receive the 2025 Bowl of Hygieia Award for Pharmacy Excellence, the community did not hesitate to show their love.

“Metlakatla Chief Clarence Nelson, he woke up at 5 in the morning to prepare a traditional smoked fish. He delivered it to our pharmacy even though he had to take his wife to the hospital. I was overwhelmed by his support,” Sha said.

“We had met because he came in one time to visit the pharmacy. And I think he was a bit surprised by what pharmacists can now do.” **T**



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Carissa Chan (left) and David Wang (right),
the two recipients of the 2025 Apotex Inc.
Award in Pharmaceutical Sciences.



Carissa Chan & David Wang

APOTEX INC. AWARD IN PHARMACEUTICAL SCIENCES

TITLES Third-Year Pharmacy Students
SCHOOL University of British Columbia
LOCATION Vancouver, B.C.

Carissa S.Y. Chan

She personally made more than 700 phone calls to reach half the community pharmacies in British Columbia, in an effort to determine how accessible Mifegymiso is in the province's community pharmacies.

Carissa S.Y. Chan is currently in her third year of the University of British Columbia's Entry-to-Practice PharmD program. She got involved at St. John Ambulance as a youth, where she now volunteers as the divisional administrative officer, while mentoring youth and teaching first aid.

But her growing passion is research.

She first got to try her hand at research through volunteering at G.F. Strong and then later, at a part-time research assistant role at the UBC Digital Emergency Medicine Lab, where she prepared for the next steps. With research funding, she was tasked to investigate the success and barriers of the Hospital-at-Home around the world, and to bring back findings to her team at Vancouver Coastal Health.

More recently, she received funding to assess the accessibility of abortion medications in British Columbia under the guidance of Dr. Laura Schummers. Between herself and another student, they called every community pharmacy in British Columbia to ask if they are able to dispense Mifegymiso and if so, how long it will take.

David Wang

When David Wang first arrived in Vancouver from Saskatchewan to study pharmacy at the University of British Columbia's Entry-to-Practice PharmD program, he realized something. Up until this point, he had never felt out of his comfort zone.

He decided to apply to be the first-year representative on the UBC Pharmacy Undergraduate Society (PhUS) and to join various university clubs. The experience made him more confident, and he wanted more.

In his second year, he ran for the vice-president of finance position with PhUS. By the third year, he was ready to try out leadership, successfully running for the PhUS President position.

During his terms, Wang led efforts to optimize the society's budget and found \$40,000 in savings — money that he is now seeking to give back to the students in the form of UBC Pharmacy backpacks.

Wang was drawn to pharmacy in part because he wants to give back to people, and also in part because of his wanderlust. The latter is not quite satisfied just yet, and after



Steven Hopp, owner of Rutland Medical Pharmacy, is the recipient of the 2025 Murray Dykeman Mentorship Award.

Steven Hopp

MURRAY DYKEMAN MENTORSHIP AWARD

TITLE	Pharmacy Manager & Owner
WORKPLACE	Rutland Medical Pharmacy
LOCATION	Kelowna, B.C.

In pharmacy, people are the most valuable resource. Pharmacist Steven Hopp has spent a career embracing this idea, whether through representation in company or regulatory elected positions, or helping mentor the next generation of pharmacists through preceptorship.

A University of British Columbia graduate of 2002, Hopp honed his skills as a staff pharmacist for Shoppers Drug Mart for the first few years in Penticton, until he had an opportunity to become associate owner of a store in Osoyoos. Soon after, he put his name forward to be part of the company's B.C. Peers Committee, a group of eight associate owners that represented their colleagues throughout the province. Hopp was elected to represent the Okanagan region, which had about 25 stores.

"I was on the committee for seven years and my job was to meet on a regular basis with senior leadership and advocate for our associates. I've always been a person who likes to get involved, and I tend to gravitate towards opportunities to try to make things better for others," Hopp said.

"During this experience, I learned about the corporate office side of things, and I learned about the struggles faced by my peers and the types of supports

they needed. I always tried to ensure our fellow associates had a voice. It taught me that you can't be stagnant in anything, or the industry will leave you behind."

From 2018 to 2024, Hopp served as an elected Board Member for the College of Pharmacists of British Columbia, including as Chair during his second term. Here, he learned about the regulatory body's focus on patient safety and access to care.

Some of the most valuable lessons he learned during this time were on the topic of Indigenous reconciliation, the impact of colonialism on First Nations, and on the role pharmacists can take in supporting cultural safety and humility, to be agents of change to improve B.C.'s health-care system for Indigenous Peoples.

"One of the wisest people I've ever met was a gentleman by the name of Sulksun. He's a Coast Salish elder and knowledge keeper and he worked a lot with us when I was with the College. He always spoke about the idea of 'Good Medicine'," Hopp said.

"The Coast Salish word for this is 'eyhh slaxin'. It doesn't necessarily mean medicine or medications as we think of it. Instead, it describes a deliberate approach to be 'Good Medicine' with every

interaction we have with a person, to get to know them, to try to help them and to care for them.”

Today, Hopp is the owner-operator of Rutland Medical Pharmacy in the eastern part of Kelowna. He also co-owns Budget Pharmacy in Duncan on Vancouver Island. Between these two stores, Hopp precepts up to seven students from UBC’s pharmacy program each year. It’s part of how he gives back.

“Many people have helped me and made a difference over my life. Growing professionally can be hard without people willing to give a young person an opportunity, willing to provide mentorship, and willing to help you along the way,” he said. “It’s an opportunity to teach them the right way to be a pharmacist, which to me, is always putting people first. I often learn from them too.”

Hopp said he had the benefit of some great mentors during his early years in pharmacy, and he draws from those past experiences in his journey to be a better mentor.

“The biggest influence on me would have been Russ Cutler, who I worked for at the Shoppers Drug Mart in Penticton. He always put people first. He created an amazing environment where everyone on staff felt valued and important. Russ was extremely involved in the community and understood success was through caring for people. Caring for your clients and also caring for your team,” Hopp said. “He would go the extra mile to care for his people just like they were his family. I have always tried to run my teams in a similar way.”

He also credited two pharmacists he worked for while he was a student.

“I worked as a pharmacy student in the summers for the Shoppers Drug Mart in Williams Lake, and there were two great associates: Ted Koelewyn and Don Martens,” he said.

“Ted was loved in the community, he ran a busy store but he always had time for the clients and that really set an example for me. Don was the same way, he truly cared about the community and would go to bat for people. These are things that I took with me, to do what’s right, to be a good person.”

And after 23 years in pharmacy, Hopp isn’t interested in legacy.

“How am I going to be remembered? That’s not important to me. The biggest legacy is the difference we can make for others, the people we reach, and the people we had an opportunity to mentor, who will go on to do bigger and better things. That, to me, is what we should be striving for,” he said. **T**



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Mike Ortynsky, pharmacist and owner of Health Team Holdings Corporation, is the recipient of the 2025 Lifetime Achievement Award.

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Mike Ortynsky

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

TITLE Pharmacist & Owner
WORKPLACE Health Team Holdings Corporation
LOCATION Fort St. John, B.C.

He's the type of pharmacist who would rather take a personal pay cut than let go of staff. He sees the true potential in others and those who meet him often find themselves partnering with his vision for decades to come. He serves the underserved, when no one else will, because he knows just how crucial access to health care can be for British Columbians in remote communities.

Mike Ortynsky began his career as a pharmacist in 1980 after he graduated from the University of British Columbia. Following in his father's footsteps, he moved north, to the lumber town of Mackenzie, where he practiced at a Boots pharmacy location, while raising a young family.

"He approaches pharmacy from the point of view of providing good service, focusing on the patient and making sure we do the best for each person," said Charissa Tonnesen, one of the co-owners in Ortynsky's pharmacy group. "He would tell me, don't worry about making money and prescription counts. If you have happy patients, healthy patients, that's when your business is going to thrive."

In 1989, Ortynsky moved with his family to Fort St. John. Here, he managed a pharmacy named Circle Drugs for about 10 years, before deciding it was time to explore purchasing his first pharmacy. The opportunity took the form of an unoccupied pharmacy space in Tumbler Ridge, a mining town two hours south of Fort St. John.

A pharmacy had recently opened there, but the pharmacist left — leaving the community without any pharmacy at all.

It was around this time Tonnesen was brought onto the team.

"At the time, we had three pharmacists. There was Mike, myself and Lori Bonertz and we were also operating the Fort St. John pharmacy," Tonnesen said. "We still didn't have a pharmacist for the Tumbler Ridge location, so every Monday, one of us would go out there and run the store for one day a week, just to keep a service there. Eventually,

we made it two days a week, and we kept expanding from there."

Together, the three decided to form a partnership and purchased the Tumbler Ridge Pharmacy space. While the trio were building up their new pharmacy, the owners of the existing store in Fort St. John had recently moved location, and subsequently wanted to cut costs. The owners wanted Ortynsky to let three staff go.

But he was not going to let anyone go. Ortynsky's first step was to cut the salaries of himself and his partners. The second was to form a human resource management company that would take over staffing responsibilities of the pharmacy through a contract with the owners. He then made every one of his employees an owner. No one was to be fired.

"This changed how all our staff thought about the business. When you're an owner, you're less likely to be searching for another job. You're going to be more concerned about how the business is run, how staff are helping customers, you're going to be thinking about the pharmacy's bottom line," Tonnesen said.

From there, the business grew quickly. He took over a major construction effort, adding a drive-through, in the correct belief that in the cold of the north, patients might appreciate staying in the warmth of their cars. He led the design of the space, putting the dispensary in the centre, with additional services fanning out like spokes on a wheel — compounding rooms, nursing rooms, travel medicine, sport-injury fittings room, and rooms for other medical needs. For this work, he was awarded the Ben Gant Innovative Practice Award in 2002.

In 2004, the group decided to purchase the Fort St. John pharmacy, now known as Fort St. John Pharmacy and Wellness Centre.

One of the ways he expanded the types of services his pharmacy offered was by bringing a nurse, Tania Bell, onto his team as another co-owner. Today, there are three nurses working at the Fort St. John location.

"He always thought that I knew best about what I could bring to the team," said Bell. "He saw things in me that I didn't quite see at that point when we first started working together. He always seemed to have all the time in the world to listen, he's constantly walking the talk, and helping others see his vision."

In 2012, the group purchased their third pharmacy, Similkameen Pharmacy, in Keremeos. Two years later, their fourth, Andreen's Pharmacy in West Kelowna. At one point, the pharmacy group had as many as 16 co-owners.

"I started here when I was 16 years old and I'm now the senior pharmacy technician," said Denay Lillico. "Mike brought me into who I am, brought me into my career and taught me what good health care is."

Across his team, there are countless stories just like this.



1. Mike Ortynsky hands the keys to one of his newer team members at Similkameen Pharmacy in Keremeos. 2. Ortynsky's graduation photo from pharmacy school. 3. Ortynsky next to his father's pharmacy in the 1970s. 4. David Ortynsky (left) and Mike Ortynsky. 5. Mike and Catherine Ortynsky's wedding photo in June 1980. 6. Mike and Catherine more recently.

"One time, a customer came in and said, 'where's Selena? Did you fire her?'" recalled Catherine Ortynsky, Mike's spouse. "My husband said, 'No, we sent her away for pharmacy training. It's a six week course. I am not going to fire her, I made her an owner.'

"These fantastic employees, he makes them owners and that's his innovation. It's like being made a partner at a law firm, and it's not just pharmacists who are eligible, it's nurses, even people who are cashiers."

After acquiring the pharmacies, Ortynsky worked with B.C.'s pharmacist regulatory authority on patient safety. He served in the College's Practice Review Committee from 2015 until 2021, was elected in 2019 as the representative for Northern B.C. on the College of Pharmacists' Board of Directors, and re-elected in 2022. During this time, he also served on the College's Audit and Finance, Quality Assurance, and Legislation Review Committees.

"His work with the College was a testament to his passion for public service and equitable health-care delivery across the province, and he was both compassionate but steadfast in his pursuit," said Andrea Silver, Chair of the College Board.

But just before Christmas 2023, the unthinkable happened.

Ortynsky was hospitalized after suffering a myocardial infarction, followed by a stroke. Ortynsky is now recovering in Vancouver with his family, his two children, grandkids, and wife. His pharmacy team is devastated without his presence.

"Everyone has definitely stepped up. We've had to move into those big shoes and pick up the slump. He is everything for us here," Lillico said.

To his team, and his patients, Ortynsky was always the strong shoulder who was there when they needed him. But he has prepared his team well, in no small part due to the decades of preparation and his approach to pharmacy ownership.

"Even though Mike is no longer being directly involved in the day to day running of the businesses, he created an environment for the businesses to succeed even if he wasn't here," Tonnesen said. "He always led by example and made sure that we were going to be capable in his absence."

"It still doesn't really seem real that he's no longer working here in the pharmacy," said Bonertz, one of the earliest pharmacist co-owners. "Although Mike had to leave the profession sooner than anticipated, his legacy will live on in the colleagues he has mentored, the patients he has impacted, and the businesses he worked so hard to establish in four separate communities."

It's in the small details, in the people-first approach Ortynsky has always taken. Each of those interactions have left impressions to last a lifetime.

"I sat in this chair one day and I was waiting for something, for a prescription, and I had a bit of a setback," recalled patient Dan Hanson, gesturing to a waiting area in the Fort St. John pharmacy.

"Mike, he put his hand on my shoulder and said a prayer with me. Right here. I can't say I have ever experienced that prior to, or subsequently, anywhere else.

"This is the only place I come to for pharmaceutical needs." **1**

Over two decades ago, Mike Ortynsky had a vision for a community pharmacy.



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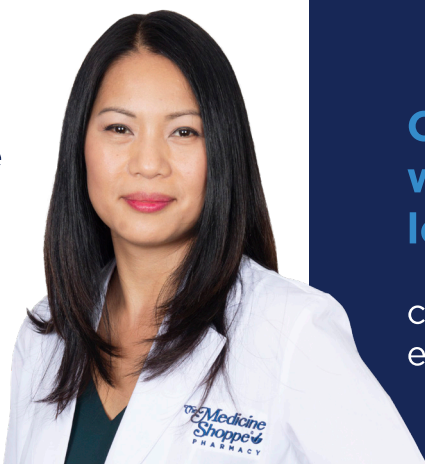
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