

FOSTERING TRUST: How PharMerica Partners to Meet

“When your headlights aren’t on, the best rearview mirror available isn’t likely to improve your driving.”

—MARTH ROGERS, AMERICAN NURSE AND RESEARCHER

Organizations all over the world, in every field, have had to rethink how they will operate in a world consumed by the pandemic resulting from the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19). The shifting of gears to account for this momentous upheaval is especially true for companies doing business in the long term and post-acute care (LT/PAC) space, which revolves around servicing facilities that are home to frail and elderly individuals most susceptible to the virus.

This is the profession PharMerica calls home as well. The leading LT/PAC pharmacy has for years broken the mold in providing the locally sourced prescriptions so vital to its customers, no matter the challenges, and at the same time guiding clients’ broader strategies with trusted real-time, in-depth insight into regulatory and policy changes via its national-level expertise.

In pre-coronavirus times, the work PharMerica’s consultant pharmacists achieved centered on in-person intelligence sharing, as well as innovative ways of delivering and managing medications, while nurturing a reputation as a neighborhood pharmacy wrapped in a larger company with the necessary scale to ensure the health and well-being of LT/PAC residents.

Now, with COVID-19 turning the world upside down, PharMerica and its roster of providers have taken their strategic partnering to a new level, complete with virtual ways of communicating, like through the pharmacy’s virtual implementation and onboarding process for new and existing clients, virtual nurse consulting services, virtual pharmacist consulting services, and online training and clinical-based webinars.

There are also new ways to deliver medications, different packaging required to meet COVID-19 guidelines, regulatory changes, and the constant battle to help alleviate the lack of personal protective equipment. To adapt to this new reality, the word partnership has taken on a much more important meaning, say PharMerica and its customers.

“The No. 1 goal of course is for our clients’ overall safety, for their staff and for their residents,” says Lindsay Johnson, corporate account manager, client services, PharMerica. “What we did proactively was to work with our pharmacy staff and couriers to ensure all are focused on frequent hand washing and are completing COVID-19 screening forms as well as temperature screenings at the beginning of each shift to make deliveries as safe as possible.”



The other big logistical change is that PharMerica has gone to a central delivery system where deliveries occur at one spot within a facility. “In some instances, for some facilities the delivery person might go in and deliver to different nursing stations, so they might make two or three stops. Now we’ve gone to just one location in a facility where we go in and we deliver,” she says.

WAKING TO A NEW REALITY

To say the world since March 2020 has changed is an understatement at best, says Cassie Mistretta, chief executive officer, Senior Living Properties, Fort Worth, Texas. She is a PharMerica client who sees the pandemic as a call to action to ensure the health and safety of residents in new ways, working in tandem with her pharmacy partner.

The provider group has 36 mostly rural long term care communities in Texas and one center in Tulsa, Okla., with the stated company mission to provide love and attention to each resident, one at a time, with all corporate decisions made with that goal in mind.

COVID-19 has changed a lot, but Mistretta says nothing can alter the mission or the ability of Senior Living Properties to adapt to the needs of its residents during a pandemic, in concert with its partners, and work to prevent infections in facilities.

“PharMerica has really helped us out. Initially, one of the most critical changes released by the CDC

the COVID-19 Challenge



[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] was guidance to switch nebulizer treatments to inhaler treatments as residents are able to tolerate. We were so grateful to them for identifying this key change in practice as waves of information were flooding our inboxes each day.”

PharMerica, Mistretta continues, was the first Senior Living Properties partner to dig this information out of mounds of pages and links in the massive CDC directive.

“We were able to educate our medical teams right away to help prevent the spread of infections, so we’re really grateful to them for doing that. It was one of those actionable

items that we are doing to try to prevent the spread in terms of medication and changes to delivery of care.”

The importance of being ahead of the curve on dealing with the pandemic when it comes to the safety of Senior Living Properties’ buildings has really been a highlight of the PharMerica relationship during the first months of fighting the virus.

“In the very beginning, PharMerica pharmacy consultants helped our centers get prepared by looking at infection control practices with delivery, storage, and administration of medication,” Mistretta says. “As the pandemic has persisted, PharMerica has adapted to meet our needs remotely. This has been done through electronic medical record reviews and virtual consulting.”

PharMerica can extend these services, both in person when it was permitted and now virtually, through the work of its 225-plus local consultant pharmacists, Johnson says. There are also more than 100 local nurse consultants in the company’s employ and a total of 140 pharmacies nationwide with a 24/7 Pharmacy On Demand program.

A TRUSTED PARTNER

Senior Living Properties has been a PharMerica client for years, using services like DischargeRx, which is for individuals who want to take a full supply of medications home, TransitionRx, a pre-admission tool, and

ViewMasterRx, the fully integrated PharMerica online portal.

Mistretta says the local pharmacy capabilities combined with the high-level consulting services have aided her company in its ability to improve quality of care and become more efficient.

“We don’t cut any corners when it comes to caring for our residents, but we are cost-conscious in other ways like any good business,” she says. “PharMerica has helped in that regard and celebrates savings successes with us, just as if they were our employees. They have moved the physician global authorization process to an online click versus the paper-chasing process it used to be.”

LASTING BONDS, BUILT OVER TIME

Marti Wdowicki, PharmD, director of clinical operations – South, PharMerica, says in the end, the PharMerica way is to focus on the consultant pharmacist and their ability to develop strong bonds with facility staff and administrators, which has helped enormously during the current crisis.

“It’s been the crutch that we have leaned on, to be able to make phone calls and have them answer our phone calls and to be able to ask very pointed questions,” she says. “We are trying to focus on a partnership and have a sensitive touch in doing so in these challenging times. This is such a chaotic environment, and all long term care facilities are having to pivot quickly, and so we have to pivot quickly with them.”

Mistretta confirms these sentiments, noting that collaborating with PharMerica is not a normal vendor-provider relationship. “We have a huge commitment to provide excellent customer service, and to that end PharMerica is really wonderful. They are incredibly responsive and flexible to meet our changing needs and demands,” she says.

“It’s hard to believe, but I haven’t had a single pharmacy issue come up to my level for resolution in terms of patients not getting the medications they need or accurately on time.”

The way it should be, in normal times and during a pandemic. “PharMerica just gets it done. Their team has remained calm and prepared every step of the way,” Mistretta says.



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