

When the Chips Are Down,

During this past year, relationships and partnerships took on new significance. Local organizations with strong national connections were able to rise above the challenges and maintain a human touch when isolation was the norm.

Chris Ferreri, chief operating officer of The Osborn Group, a continuing care retirement community in Westchester, N.Y., experienced this firsthand. In the midst of the pandemic, access to personal protective equipment (PPE) was at a premium, and finding a laboratory that could get COVID testing results in short order was nearly impossible.

Yet, Ferreri and his team were able to get both, thanks to a strong relationship with a national partner.

A Partner Can Help

"We were doing 600 COVID tests a week, and PharMerica connected us with a reliable laboratory company that was able to get us results in 24 to 36 hours," he says. "PharMerica also helped us find PPE suppliers that were able to get us what we needed for affordable prices."

PharMerica's national connections made a difference for Ferreri and his local community. "What they did during the pandemic was beyond the bounds of what a pharmacy provider does," he says, adding, "They see themselves as a partner, and their efforts demonstrate this time and again."

Quick Access to Dwindling Supplies

Len Russ, owner/administrator of Bayberry Care Center, a New Rochelle, N.Y.-based partnership specializing in skilled nursing, subacute, and

in-patient short-term rehab care, agrees. His partners at PharMerica jumped right in to help ensure Russ and his team had adequate PPE, and they kept pharmacy services functioning without delays. This included ensuring drivers could drop off drugs safely and without personal contact.

Russ says, "Last year was trial by fire, and we came through it stronger." Ferreri adds, "There were people who were looking to profit from the pandemic, but PharMerica's focus was on helping our residents and enabling us to survive and thrive."

"We knew what we were dealing with in early March," Russ recalls. "We were scrambling to manage, and PharMerica helped us access their supply chains, which we wouldn't have been able to do on our own."

Vaccine Access Assured

The "crème de la crème" of PharMerica's support during the pandemic, Ferreri says, involved COVID-19 vaccines. "Rochelle [Stern, RN, PharMerica director of client services] made sure we got enough vaccines for all of our residents, including those in independent living," he says. Even after six vaccine clinics with Walgreens, PharMerica came in and did three more onsite.

"The clock was ticking, and PharMerica stepped up to ensure we had access to all the vaccines we needed. They understood our goals and made a commitment to get us shots in arms," he says.

Russ adds, "After the initial free clinics, we had no way to get more vaccines for those who still hadn't gotten vaccinated. PharMerica deployed vaccines to us on a weekly basis in the doses we needed. Ultimately, no one had to wait for a shot."

Partners Come Through



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Survey Support and Beyond

While survey activity was down during COVID, PharMerica continued to provide remote survey support. Surveys are stressful for even the best buildings. Having the experience of a national organization that understands the ins and outs of surveys and what surveyors are looking for at any given time can alleviate some of that anxiety and enable leaders like Russ and Ferreri and their teams to focus on what they do best—providing the best possible care for their residents.

As a former director of nursing, PharMerica's Rochelle Stern knows what happens on the skilled nursing side and how to prepare for surveys.

"This was one of the benefits PharMerica brought to the table," says Ferreri. "While it's great to deliver great pricing and helping our bottom line, it comes down to relationships and partners that can help in all aspects of our work, and survey support is part of that."

While PharMerica goes above and beyond pharmacy services, its national footprint helps its local clients have quick access to the medications they need when they need them at the

right price. How important is this? Russ stresses, "Pharmacy is the lifeblood of care." It needs to function flawlessly, he says.

"We count on them every day for medications. Pre-COVID, we had 600 admissions a year and, with that, comes a tremendous amount of medication tracking, man-

agement, and monitoring," says Ferreri. "That is the basis of our relationship."

Teamwork? Priceless

In long term care, says Russ, "teamwork is everything. It's key to successful relationships and the delivery of care. It's an essential part of doing business in this industry. The value of having a pharmacy provider that threads the needle between the infrastructure of a large company and providing very personalized service is priceless."

"These relationships are extremely close," Stern says. "One thing that distinguishes us is that we put ourselves in our customers' shoes and look at things from their experience. We're more than just a pharmacy."

Crises test relationships. As Ferreri says, "Things change so fast, your head spins. You need to be able to have knowledgeable people who are hooked into networks across the country. Having a team to help us weave through all of the obstacles is key." ■