



# Regional Pharmacies: Collaborators in Excellent Patient Care

**+** Plus: top factors when considering a pharmacy partner

## Q & A with

### Melissa Woodward, RN, MS

With 30 years as a registered nurse, Melissa Woodward, RN, MS, has a wealth of experience working with long-term care pharmacies, most recently as Vice President of Resident Care with The Arbor Company.



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Melissa Woodward, RN, MS, has a wealth of experience working with long-term care pharmacies, most recently as Vice President of Resident Care with The Arbor Company. Melissa sat down with Pam Kramer, Forum's Executive Vice President, to discuss the top factors in choosing a pharmacy partner.

**Pam:** What are some advantages of working with a regional pharmacy?

**Melissa:** To have a regional pharmacy as a vested partner in patient care makes a critical difference in quality of life for residents. Pharmacy relationships are an **essential link** in providing professional, proactive care for residents while streamlining operations.

A valued pharmacy collaboration not only plays a **vital role** in managing medications, but can help ease the burden of navigating the nuances of location-specific regulatory and staffing challenges, complex clinical issues, operational questions, and electronic health record (EHR) integrations.

As acuity rises in both nursing homes and assisted living, local and regional pharmacy partnerships should be considered as a part of your team.

**Pam:** How does pharmacy communication and availability affect care?

**Melissa:** Most pharmacological issues start with a breakdown in communication. Often a minor issue balloons out of control due to lack of accurate information. Mistakes are going to happen, as resident care is a human business. Having a **partnership** and open communication with pharmacy is essential for accountability and solutions when clear and thorough communication is needed.

Communities should always consider if **after-hours communication** is available and if there is a designated account manager to contact if a problem arises. Availability (especially on weekends) tends to be a huge issue. When considering a pharmacy, executives should make sure to understand:

- Can they respond in an emergency?
- What is their process or policy if there is a need for medication on a weekend?
- Are pharmacy personnel routinely in your building as a resource for residents and staff?

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**Pam:** Could you give an example when a regional pharmacy was crucial in helping a patient?

**Melissa:** I have countless stories about the benefits of working with regional pharmacy — here's one. I had a new resident in our senior care community, who had missed taking a psychotropic medication for three straight days. As you know, this can cause significant health and mental issues.

As soon as I identified this gap in care, I frantically called the regional pharmacy. It was 9:00 pm, so I was just hoping someone would pick up the phone. Not only did they answer, but they immediately understood the urgent and volatile situation. Without hesitation, they were able to dispense an **emergency supply** and **deliver** it that evening. This story could have ended quite differently had I been calling a big-box pharmacy.

**Pam:** What should communities look for in pharmacy staffing?

**Melissa:** Long-term care pharmacy expertise is **critical** to providing excellent patient care. A pharmacy's clinical staff is an **essential** resource to answer questions...even catch oversights that can happen when staffing is stretched in your building. Staffing questions to ask include:

- What is the ratio of full-time to part-time or PRN staff?
- Do staff have long-term care pharmacy expertise?
- Will they be responsive to onsite visits?

**Pam:** Many regional pharmacies offer training and education — do these make a difference?

**Melissa:** New staff training and ongoing in-services make a huge difference in closing communication gaps and **saving** staff significant time.

Training provides needed information for **efficiency**, effectiveness, and consistency in processes and procedures.

Be sure to ask:

- Do you provide on-site or live webinar training?
- Do you provide new staff training, such as slides or handouts?

**Pam:** We've found that some don't understand the importance of packaging options — could you explain a little more?

**Melissa:** Some pharmacies only offer a single type of packaging, and others offer **multiple** types. Your resident population may need different types of packaging or different types of delivery systems. It is important to know:

- Does the pharmacy offer on-demand or cycle refill? Which is better for you?
- What types of packaging are available?
- Are a variety of packaging options available and easy to use? Is the pharmacy flexible?
- How can they help you reduce waste and/or nursing time?

**Pam:** Electronic health records — how does your pharmacy choice impact EHR?

**Melissa:** Integration with electronic health records (EHR) is another **critical factor** for superior pharmacy collaboration. Consider:

- What is the pharmacy's technological ability to integrate with EHRs?
- What kind of support or assistance does the pharmacy provide?

**Pam:** Thanks so much for your time — is there anything you'd like to add?

**Melissa:** When I participated in a panel discussion on long-term care pharmacies, another panelist told a **powerful** experience that affected his entire community. They had a pharmacist sit in on a committee meeting to reduce Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs) across the community.

The pharmacist suggested trying black chokeberry juice as a preventative measure, as he had read some recent studies from the National Institute of Health about reducing UTIs in nursing homes. My colleague started a program for all residents with chronic UTIs and included chokeberry juice.

They studied the effects for a year and reported **100% effectiveness**: the number of residents with chronic UTIs went to zero! It was a value-added pharmacy partnership, with communication, long-term care expertise, and active participation in meetings that had a huge impact on residents' quality of life, while saving staff time.

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