

New Mexico state exec experiences Pharmacist Clinician's patient care firsthand

SONYA COLLINS

Dale Tinker just wanted to do the right thing for his health. After 50 years, he finally quit smoking. But in the process of freeing himself from one health problem, he developed another.

"I immediately started gaining weight. At my next doctor visit, my A1C [glycosylated hemoglobin] was increasing and working toward [diabetes]," Tinker said. "I was trying to get healthier by quitting smoking, but instead went crazy with the snacking." At the following visit, Tinker's doctor diagnosed him with type 2 diabetes.

Shortly after his diagnosis, Tinker was referred to see Kathleen Wade, PharmD, PhC, CDE, for care. For Tinker, it was no surprise when the doctor referred him not to another physician but to a Pharmacist Clinician for diabetes education and disease management. "Since I was a lobbyist who helped pass the [advanced pharmacy practice] bill in 1993, I always expected that eventually I would work with a Pharmacist Clinician myself. I've spent the last 25 years trying to convince health plans they ought to reimburse pharmacists for clinical services," Tinker said.

Advocate—and patient

Tinker, who is executive director of the New Mexico Pharmacists Association, has to advocate for health plans to reimburse pharmacists because pharmacists do not have provider status. CMS does out the qualification of "provider" to most providers of health services—but not to pharmacists.

CMS sets the standard for whom commercial health plans reimburse as well. As a result, health plans may only cover clinical pharmacy services for a small subset of patients under specific circumstances, or they may not cover the services at all.

With provider status, more pharmacists could help more patients like Tinker—people with a new diagnosis of diabetes who have a lot to learn in



Kathleen Wade



Dale Tinker

order to manage their condition.

"Most new [patients with diabetes] just don't understand the disease, what the problem is, what the comorbidities are, what the complications are. So in the first visit, I talk to them and get a sense for how much they know about their condition and then decide how the visit needs to go," said Wade, who is Tinker's Pharmacist Clinician.

Pharmacist Clinicians in New Mexico, upon referral from a Primary Care Provider, can manage a disease from A to Z, including writing prescriptions and ordering labs. Although CMS does not recognize pharmacists as providers, Presbyterian Health Services in Albuquerque, NM, recognizes Pharmacist Clinicians as Advanced Practice Clinicians with a unique skill set that can help keep their patients healthier and out of the hospital.

Keeping diabetes under control

During their first visit, Wade taught Tinker about the condition and the first steps toward keeping it under control. "She explained the role of the pancreas, what eating habits don't work the same way because of diabetes, what I should be eating, and how much I should be exercising," Tinker recalled.

Wade has also helped Tinker devise an exercise strategy to fit his schedule. "My commute is about an hour," Tinker said. "I don't get home until 7:00 [pm] and eat dinner at 8:00 or 8:30 [pm], so finding time to exercise is very difficult." Wade encouraged Tinker to start with just a 10-minute walk each day, rather than assume he had to do 30 minutes or nothing. "It's easier to find 10 minutes than it is to find the half-hour that all the guidelines recommend."

Because diabetes requires everyday self-management that includes the coordination of medications, diet, and exercise, patients need comprehensive education. That level of orientation doesn't align easily with the 15-minute doctor visit model. "There is such a provider shortage that everybody wants pharmacists involved in patient care," Wade said. "The Pharmacist Clinicians at Presbyterian are an integral part of the patient-centered medical home, and our contribution to a patient's medical care is becoming the norm."

Road to health

With his smoking habit behind him and Wade's help, Tinker is on his way to controlling his weight and diabetes. While he's at it, Tinker will continue to advocate for other patients to get the kind of care he receives.

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Provider status stories

Pharmacists are health care providers. In a series of profiles appearing in *Pharmacy Today* and on pharmacist.com, pharmacists explain how their patients would benefit from provider status. And as part of our campaign for provider status, APhA has asked pharmacists to share their story of how they provide care to their patients and how provider status will improve health care. These stories are collected on the APhA YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/user/aphapharmacists/playlists>. If you would like to share your story, please visit PharmacistsProvideCare.com.