

Compounding pharmacies experience higher demand during medication shortages

January 31 2023, by Milana Madzarac



Joseph Abdelnour at work in a compounding pharmacy. Credit: University of Waterloo

When Joseph Abdelnour accepted his recent co-op work term at Avalon Compound Pharmacy (ACP), he never anticipated the new challenges he would face.

With no children's cold medications available in Ottawa and the inability to order from distributors, pharmacists were advising patients to visit nearby emergency rooms, where they must wait for many hours. The other common advice is to visit compounding pharmacies.

Compounding pharmacies create prescribed medications in-house for patients, whereas [retail pharmacies](#) can only offer medications on the market that they order. Abdelnour's co-op was at just such a compounding [pharmacy](#).

Drug shortages extend to adult medications

"Co-op terms can be overwhelming for some, but this fall had its own specific challenges. On top of the regular workload, ACP experienced an increase in patients due to [medication](#) shortages," Abdelnour says.

The surge of needed medications resulted in Abdelnour and his supervisor compounding more medications in the same ten-hour shift, while ensuring standards are upheld. The [time pressure](#) and meeting requirements for regular prescriptions were difficult to meet with the increased demand for cold medications.

"We are now seeing a medication shortage, whether it be over-the-counter or prescription, for adult medications as well," says Andrew Hanna, pharmacist supervisor at ACP. "Not only is there an additional burden on the health-care system that is already overwhelmed, but now there's an added strain for patients. This is where a pharmacist's expertise comes into play. We can make those missing medications for them, it just takes time."

Abdelnour spent his co-op work term compounding medications and reassuring stressed patients in long lineups that there are enough medications for everyone. Additionally, he educated patients on what a compounding pharmacy is, as this was new information to many in the community.

"For us, the School of Pharmacy co-op program is incredibly important," says Hanna. "It's the missing piece of the puzzle. Co-op students are extremely valuable to the industry. Students can explore different opportunities in pharmacy while learning hands-on skills, but we also learn from them. Every student brings unique value through their knowledge and skills,"

Co-op student takes on more responsibilities

In addition to higher demand, stressed patients and excess work, Abdelnour and his supervisor faced staffing issues, as one of the pharmacist technicians broke her arm. With a smaller team and higher demand, ACP gave Abdelnour more independence and responsibility.

"I really wanted to help CHEO, Ottawa's pediatric hospital, during their time of need. But my co-op supervisor needed me to stay. I took on technician responsibilities, transcribing prescriptions and additional compounding duties where I processed regular prescriptions and communicated with other health-care prescribers. I also helped administer COVID-19 vaccinations and flu shots," Abdelnour says.

"I'm thankful for my supervisor during this stressful time. We helped each other a lot while dealing with increased demand. He provided me with constant support and resources while giving me constructive criticism to improve. This was a great learning environment."

Compound pharmacies help ease strain on health-care system

Abdelnour witnessed Canada's medical system in a vulnerable state. Compound pharmacies are stepping up to meet demand while providing the best care to [patients](#).

"Pharmacists should be given further expanded scope of practice so we can train to do more to help the community," Abdelnour says.

Abdelnour is still discovering what career path he wants to take in pharmacy, but after working at ACP he knows he wants a diverse career working in a community pharmacy in addition to institutions.

"Joseph was an excellent co-op student, the best I've had in ten years. If he wishes to come back, there's a job waiting for him," says Hanna.

Provided by University of Waterloo

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