



UMB Champions of Excellence

Revolutionizing the Role of the Pharmacist



Cherokee Layson-Wolf, PharmD '00, BCACP, FAPhA | University of Maryland School of Pharmacy

[View Full 2017-2018 Champions of Excellence Gallery](#)

[Find Out More About the Champions of Excellence Campaign](#)

Sometimes lights go off in the strangest places.

For Cherokee Layson-Wolf, PharmD '00, BCACP, FAPhA, associate professor and associate dean for student affairs at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy, it was during a community pharmacy residency with Virginia Commonwealth University and Ukrop's Pharmacy in 2000. There, Layson-Wolf saw firsthand the practice barriers for pharmacists in her native Maryland compared to their peers in other states. Take immunizations, for example.

According to the Maryland Pharmacists Association, the single best way to prevent the spread of 16 serious illnesses, including the flu, is to get vaccinated. Unfortunately, there are thousands of people across the state of Maryland without convenient access to trained health care professionals who can administer vaccines.

At the time of Layson-Wolf's residency, only nine states allowed pharmacists to immunize — Maryland pharmacists were not allowed to vaccinate until 2006.

Virginia was one of the few states with access then, and Layson-Wolf observed community pharmacists doing screenings and giving immunizations, and providing important community health outreach. One resident even set up patient education programs on topics like diabetes, right on-site.

"I couldn't believe I had never heard of or done this before," she says. "It was like a light went off."

This was the catalyst that launched Layson-Wolf into ongoing efforts to steer the pharmacist's changing role in community practice. Pharmacists weren't just dispensing medications any more, she thought. They were bringing improvements and innovations to community health. They were educating communities on diabetes, self-care, substance and drug abuse, drug disposal, and more. They were immunizing people in need.

In essence, they were more than traditional pharmacists — they were true health care providers.

Seventeen years ago, Layson-Wolf returned to Maryland on a mission — to train the next generation of pharmacy students for that new role and advocate for these capabilities at the state level. Maryland was always home, she says, and she felt lucky to partner with her alma mater, the School of Pharmacy, ranked in the top 10 nationally.

"The University of Maryland, Baltimore was already fighting for immunizations and screenings at that time, but I was able to help support that cause," she says. "That's why I came back to UMB, why I'm still here, and why we do a lot of work with rounding out what pharmacists are able to do in the profession."

Joining the faculty, she set out to develop screening programs for pharmacists, initiatives that would benefit both pharmacy students and communities, and transform the school's curriculum — to reposition the pharmacist as an integral part of the health care team.

"I explain to students that it's part of what you have to do in the field," she says. Opportunities like these aren't widely available, she adds, but everything pharmacists can do now in Maryland was the result of pharmacists before them fighting for legislation and policy change.

Today, pharmacists can administer immunizations in all 50 states, as well as Washington, D.C. In the next 10 years or so, Layson-Wolf sees pharmacists continuing to fight to provide many patient care services not broadly recognized by all providers, such as education on pain management and reducing the risk of opioid addiction.

Today's pharmacists, including Layson-Wolf, advocate on both state and national levels to change how pharmacists are defined as health care providers, to better serve their patients and close the gap between primary care and community pharmacies.

In 2012, the School of Pharmacy won the first-ever national Script Your Future Medication Adherence Challenge for student pharmacists. Under Layson-Wolf's leadership, students worked together with the Script Your Future Baltimore coalition to educate the public at health fairs and other local events. Since the Challenge began in 2011, more than 12,000 future health care professionals have directly counseled nearly 50,000 patients and reached more than 23 million consumers about the importance of medication adherence.

Layson-Wolf's ties to the national Script Your Future campaign date to 2011 when she was a speaker at the national campaign kickoff. She's long been a leader. Not long after graduation from the School of Pharmacy in 2000, she worked with Maryland Pharmacists Association (MPhA) leadership and staff to support a number of pharmacy education, practice, and advocacy initiatives. Now she is president of the MPhA.

In 2014, Layson-Wolf was honored with the American Pharmacists Association's (APhA) Community Pharmacy Residency Excellence in Precepting award for her advancing residency training and the future of the pharmacy profession.

Layson-Wolf also has served as faculty advisor for Vote & Vax, where pharmacy students provide free flu shots to people at centers adjacent to voting places who would not have had access otherwise.

Each year, tens of thousands of people in the U.S. are hospitalized and thousands die from flu-related illness. Since 2010, this community outreach project has vaccinated hundreds of people on Election Day throughout Prince George's, Anne Arundel, and Montgomery counties. Layson-Wolf says about a third of the people vaccinated on-site had never had a flu shot before.

“We were able to continue to serve a really mixed community in terms of resources and cultural backgrounds,” she says of Vote & Vax. “We really stayed true to the school’s goal to serve as many people as possible.”

The University of Maryland, Baltimore is the founding campus of the University System of Maryland.
620 W. Lexington St., Baltimore, MD 21201 | 410-706-3100
© 2019-2020 University of Maryland, Baltimore. All rights reserved.