

**Pharmacists as Team Players:  
An Interview with Bill Sheeley, R. Ph.**

By Judith A. Greenfield, PhD, RN

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When covering the subject of medications, one cannot ignore the very important role that pharmacists play as members of the healthcare team. To get a better sense of what they do and how they can help patients understand and manage medications, we sat down with Bill Sheeley, a Registered Pharmacist (R.PH.) practicing in New Paltz, NY.

**REVIEW:** *Please describe your role as a pharmacist.*

**BS:** I am the middleman between doctors and patients. I try to help patients correctly take the medications their doctors prescribed for their problems. I counsel them on how, when, and with what to take their medication. I advise them about side effects, (trying to do so without scaring them); I talk to them about the number of times a day to take their medications and whether to take them with meals; I might tell them what to expect in the way of symptom relief and how long it should take for them to see some relief from the medication. I also help with insurance coverage for scripts. This includes coordinating with doctors and insurers to make sure that patients get prescriptions for meds that their insurers will cover; getting insurer approval for an emergency supply of medications when mail order medications are late, and so on. About 30-40% of my time is taken up with doing things like this.

**REVIEW:** *Can people come to you with questions about things like foods or other things to avoid when taking their medications?*

**BS:** Yes, through continuing education and professional publications, we are able to keep up to date on what is being learned about things like drug interactions with foods and when it's best to take certain medications – like Statins, which are best taken at night, after dinner or at bedtime.

**REVIEW:** *What should patients ask the pharmacist when they bring in a prescription to be filled, and what should they check on the label?*

**BS:** They should check their name on the label and make sure they have the right medication. They should also look at the directions for taking the medication. They should make sure they know how and when to take the medication and they should take it exactly as prescribed. They should also know what its side effects are.

**REVIEW:** *Getting back to the label, how can patients check that the prescription has been filled correctly when they can't understand what's written on prescription form?*

**BS:** I can help them understand what the prescription says, before I fill it, so they can check to make sure it's the right thing. I think it's better to do all the deciphering at the

pharmacy counter because two heads are better than one and I can help patients understand things better. For instance, some drugs have an unlabeled use. I mean, a drug that has been approved by the FDA for the treatment of one condition [the “labeled use”] may also be helpful for treating a different condition [the “unlabeled use”]. So if patients who get drugs for the unlabeled use are confused by that and think it was a mistake, I can explain it to them.

**REVIEW:** *Do pharmacists have educational materials for patients?*

**BS:** Yes. We have documents for every drug, to give out, and manufacturers’ information sheets that are written in lay terms.

**REVIEW:** *Some patient advocates suggest that patients speak to their doctors or pharmacists about how to find financial assistance. Is that something you can help with?*

**BS:** Yes. First of all, I have information about [EPIC](#) [the New York State drug assistance program for the elderly]. Also, many drug manufacturers have programs that allow patients who meet certain conditions to purchase the drugs that they make at reduced rates. For instance, Medicare patients can get cards from some manufacturers, which allows them to purchase drugs for the price of a \$15 co-pay. Some of these programs are income driven (for people below certain income levels). I have applications for these cards here. People can also visit [www.needymeds.com](http://www.needymeds.com) where they can find a list of all the manufacturers that have programs for people who can’t afford medications.

**REVIEW:** *Is there anything else you’d like to say?*

**BS:** I’d like to make a plug for the independent pharmacy. We offer a source of information, service level, and friendliness that is more conducive to good health. Although I think that’s true in most cases, it also is helped by the fact that we have had the same pharmacists working in the store for the last 15 years. So we have had the time to get to know our patients. ف

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