



No Limits

Deafness doesn't derail Bethany Sather's pharmacy aspirations

Ever since attending Gallaudet University, a liberal arts school for deaf and hard of hearing students in Washington D.C., Bethany Sather, had aspirations of becoming a pharmacist. Yet, she was a bit hesitant—she didn't know how the customers would react to her being deaf.

Sather, a community pharmacy resident at Medicap Pharmacy in Des Moines, Iowa, graduated from the University of Iowa College of Pharmacy with a

Pharm.D. in May 2003, took her boards that August, and soon was licensed. She initially was exposed to Medicap during her first rotation in her final year of pharmacy school. She did a five-week rotation with the Medicap corporate headquarters office.

"I was actually contacted by my preceptor, John Forbes shortly after I did a rotation at his pharmacy," said Sather by e-mail. "He asked if I was interested in assuming the role of a pharmacy resident for

PHOTOGRAPH: GANDEE VASANI (SEASCAPE)



Association of Chain Drug Stores. The institute has made a major commitment to community pharmacy residencies by encouraging pharmacy students to spend a year in a community or chain pharmacy before becoming a pharmacy owner or manager.

A Positive Experience

John Forbes, R.Ph., owner of Medicap in Des Moines and an NCPA member, said having Sather at his pharmacy has been a positive experience for both him and his staff. "The patients she works with have a high respect for her and I have had many positive compliments on her work and caring attitude," said Forbes. "Bethany completed a five-week rotation during her last year of school so I knew that she would blend in very well with our pharmacy practice. She has now been with us over six months now and I don't even think of her having any disability as she works so well with staff and patients we serve."

Sather started her year-long residency at Medicap in July 2003 and she said:

"They have been wonderful here at Medicap and have made me feel very welcomed. Granted, the customers are a little surprised when they see an interpreter with me for the first time. But once they know that I'm deaf and that the level of communication is not compromised, they are at ease and they treat me the way they would treat any other pharmacist. Some of them even ask me how to sign 'thank you' and such."

Overcoming Challenges

Even though Sather has been deaf all her life, she's never let this challenge interfere with her goals. What advice would she give to others in a similar situation? "Believe that you are in control of your destiny, she said."

Sather continues, "Of course, there were obstacles and I had to do a lot of groundbreaking, but at the same time, it also taught a lot of people that just because I'm deaf, it doesn't mean that I'm limited in what I can do. Sometimes the best thing you can do is prove people wrong."

While at Medicap Pharmacy, Sather does "a little bit of everything." She acts as the pharmacist. She does research on potential drug therapy problems and conducts research on anything drug-related for other pharmacists or for the patients.

"I have one-on-one meetings with patients when they need some consulting or education to better understand their medication or disease states," said Sather. "I am certified to give influenza vaccinations, so I have been doing that as well. Occasionally, I will do some compounding in the lab. I've done health fairs (bone density screening, BP screening, blood glucose readings, cholesterol tests). I was also recently approved for a grant that I wrote for my residency

Medicap/Drake University (this residency is shared between Medicap and the Drake University College of Pharmacy). I embraced the thought of continuing my learning with the guidance of a very distinguished pharmacist who is highly respected in the community. The experience has been extraordinary. I cannot think of a better way to start my career. I have learned so much beyond the scope of a classroom."

Sather's residency is one of dozens that have received more than \$4 million in funding from the Institute for the Advancement of Community Pharmacy, which was created by NCPA and the National

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Sather works Medicap Pharmacy's compounding lab, assisted by Medicap owner John Forbes.

research project on medication safety, which will feature the MD.2, a personal automated medication dispenser. This past October, I had the privilege of attending the 105th NCPA exposition in Seattle with my preceptor, John Forbes."

Working to Create Awareness

Through her work, Sather aspires to usher in a wave of greater awareness and understanding—empowering people to take care of themselves through understanding their disease states and how their medications work.

"I would like to partake in a transforming process where pharmacists will not merely be seen as pill dispensers but rather facilitators and health care providers," said Sather. "In an era where pharmacist care is becoming the norm, I want to be a part of a vision that brings people to the cutting edge of awareness that can enable them to take greater initiative and responsibility for their health. Together, patients and pharmacists can be pioneers in a revolution of the pharmacy industry into an agent of health empowerment and education."

Developing Relationships

Sather said even though being deaf has played a huge role in her life, she hopes to continue working in retail pharmacy when her residency ends. "Being deaf has made me much more empathetic toward customers and others because I can relate on certain levels,"

said Sather. "I enjoy the dynamics of it and I also enjoy the daily interaction with patients and developing relationships with them. I've experienced times when my deafness has worked against me but I have always found a way through it."

Forbes believes that if pharmacists have this unique opportunity to work with residents, such as Sather, he would highly recommend it. "We have learned that being deaf is not a deterrent to being able to provide pharmacist care to patients who are requesting help," he said. "When a patient presents a drug therapy problem to me I will then consult with Bethany about the problem through a sign language consultant who is in the pharmacy about 75 percent of the time. Bethany will then research the problem and usually get back to me in 24 hours or less. We will then discuss the case, which is usually in written form, before we schedule an appointment with the patient where Bethany will then communicate directly with the patient."

Forbes added, "There is no question that deaf pharmacists can provide the same level of care that a regular speaking pharmacist can. The only barrier is making sure you have qualified sign language consultants that are familiar with medical terminology and pharmaceutical names. With that in place, we are all on the same playing field." ■



Sather performs a lipids profile on a patient in Medicap Pharmacy's wellness center.