

GUIDANCE:

HOSTING A PHARMACY VISIT WITH YOUR STATE OR FEDERAL LEGISLATORS



Inviting your state or federal legislator to visit and tour your pharmacy is an excellent way to build a relationship and bring attention to the compounding community and issues it faces. Giving a tour of your pharmacy can be a highly effective way to educate a non-pharmacist about compounding and to create a lasting impression. APC's goal is to have twelve visits hosted among its member pharmacies in 2021. This guide will discuss how to plan and conduct the visit, and offer tips based on the experiences of APC members who have hosted such visits.

Planning the visit

Visits should be scheduled while the members are not in session. The best way to invite a member to visit your pharmacy is on their turf, ideally at a fundraiser or community event where you can interact personally and where they are focused on interacting with constituents (i.e., you). If possible, attend events early and often when members are in the district so you can establish a rapport before extending the invitation. Contact the staff members to schedule the visit. Be prepared to take some time to discuss compounding, your pharmacy, and the patients you serve when you extend the invitation. Even if the member is not able to visit, roll out the welcome mat for staffers who might want to visit. When staffers share their positive experience with the member it increases the chance that he or she will personally visit.

Research the member. Read his or her biography and have a general understanding of his or her positions on important issues. Assess their level of involvement with the pharmaceutical industry, and with the compounding community in particular. Determine what they have done for (or against) the compounding community and what policies and legislative initiatives they have supported (or opposed) in the past or are currently supporting (or opposing).

Reach out to APC for assistance in inviting your member of Congress, planning the meeting, and obtaining information on the member of Congress's past support. APC can also let you know any hot-button issues you may want to raise, and can provide you with talking points. Also, it is a good idea to connect with APC the day before the congressional visit to get the latest information. For instance, if there is a joint letter circulating that APC is urging members of Congress to sign, and your member signs just before his or her visit, APC can make you aware of that development — and you can be prepared to thank the member of Congress when they arrive.

APC provides one-page issue briefs on all its compounding public policy priority issues. You will find them under the Advocacy tab at A4PC.org. While it is probably not a good idea to try to discuss every priority issue in a single visit, it is important for you to be well-versed on the issues and to be able to raise them in context with your member of Congress.

Conducting the visit

Aim to keep the entire visit to an hour or less. When the member and/or staffer arrives at your pharmacy, be sure to check with them again regarding the anticipated time to make sure their schedule has not changed. Your visit should have three parts: (1) an initial introduction and discussion; (2) a tour; and (3) a wrap-up. We strongly suggest that you have the discussion first, before the tour. Your discussion will provide necessary context to make the tour meaningful and build the member's interest.

Introduction and discussion. Greet your guest and direct him or her to a comfortable office or conference room. Introduce yourself and the pharmacy staff that have joined you, share how long you and your families have lived in the community, and how long your pharmacy has been in the community. Kick off the conversation by asking how much the member knows about compounding. Ask whether he or she has any family members or friends who have ever used a compounded medication. Some may be quite familiar with compounding, but expect that most are not, or are only vaguely aware of what it is. If they are unfamiliar with compounding, then you will need to explain it using clear, simple language. One of the easiest ways is with an analogy, such as baking cookies:

A manufactured drug is like a pack of Chips Ahoy! cookies. A compounded drug is like a chocolate chip cookie baked from scratch. When you get a pack of Chips Ahoy!, what you get is what you get. If there's an ingredient you or your child is allergic to, you can't take it out. You can't add more chocolate chips, macadamia nuts, or any other ingredient to a finished cookie that would make it better. On the other hand, with a cookie you bake from scratch, you can substitute ingredients, add additional ingredients, bake it to your preferred level of gooeyness, and make it as big or as small as you want.

This analogy can be expanded to explain other aspects of compounding as well. (For example, *compounding using a manufactured drug as your API is like using Breyer's vanilla ice cream as a base for a cookies-and-cream milkshake with those homemade cookies.*)

The discussion will vary depending on the nature of the visit. If you are hosting a member or staffer with whom you do not have a previously established relationship and who is new to compounding issues, then your primary goal should be to build a connection with your guest. Whether you are meeting to discuss a specific issue or simply to educate the member about your pharmacy, the first part of the discussion should focus on painting a picture of the role your pharmacy plays in the delivery of healthcare to the people the member represents. Describe the kinds of medications you prepare, the conditions that you treat, and the patients that you serve. Your goal is not to give an inventory of the products you sell, but to tell a story about the problems you solve. Many people outside the profession are unfamiliar with the myriad reasons why patients need compounded medications and do not realize how many situations exist where patient needs cannot be met through manufactured drugs. Additionally, many do not realize that compounding pharmacies have become highly specialized to meet specific patient needs. (This can be especially helpful to show

why protecting the ability of pharmacies to ship out-of-state is so important.) Be prepared with one or two “impact stories” about specific patients who rely on your medications (leaving out identifying information, of course) for life-sustaining treatments or greatly improved quality of life. Share your unique areas of expertise and what makes patients and physicians choose *your* compounding pharmacy.

While we do not recommend bombarding a member with statistics, sharing some key data can be a highly effective way to illustrate your pharmacy’s presence in the community—and across the region or even the whole country. Consider preparing a brief data sheet that you can send with the member when he or she leaves. Consider including:

- States in which you are licensed
- Where your prescribers are located (i.e., how many are located in different cities in the region, what percent are out of state)
- If you routinely prepare medications for hospital administration, where those hospitals are located
- Where your patients are located
- The number of people you employ

Here are a few things to keep in mind when discussing a specific issue, if that is the purpose of your visit:

Identify who will be impacted by the issue and how—i.e., your business, your employees, your patients, local hospitals, physicians.

If the issue involves the Food & Drug Administration, you should explain the negative impacts from its actions but avoid negative talk about the agency itself. You never know what personal connections your guest may have with FDA or how they feel about the agency’s work. In general, appearing bitter or resistant to regulation is rarely a good look.

Be prepared to explain the issue in simple, clear terms with the appropriate level of detail based on the legislator’s baseline knowledge or experience with the issue.

Be prepared with a specific “ask” for your member.

Conducting the tour. If possible, continue operations during the tour. Explain what different areas of your pharmacy are used for and give a general overview of workflow in the space to paint a picture of the day-to-day process of compounding. Ideally, the member will be able to watch some part of the compounding process. Avoid giving too much detail or using technical language that may overwhelm and confuse your guest. Let them lead with questions. If possible, have the member gown up to access certain areas if required by your guidelines. In our experience, most enjoy doing this. Some members feel this makes for a great photo opportunity, but be sure to ask first—others may not want to be photographed in a hairnet! Think ahead to make sure there’s a private, comfortable spot where the member can gown up, and make sure you have the appropriate sizes handy. Make sure not to take photos inside your pharmacy if doing so would violate your SOPs.

Outside in front of the pharmacy with the pharmacy's signage in the background is a great place for a photo – both for you and for the member.

Wrap up. Invite the member or staffer to ask any additional questions they have. If you discussed any specific issues facing your pharmacy or the compounding community, now is the time to make sure that the member understands the issue and to ask whether they can commit to a particular position or action. Offer to serve as a resource for any questions the member (or his or her staffers) may have about compounding, the challenges facing the industry, or the needs of the patients in his or her district that you serve.

After the visit

After the visit, send an e-mail thanking the member or staffer for taking the time to visit your pharmacy and reflecting on any key aspects of the visit. Reiterate the offer to be a resource and answer questions, and promptly send any follow-up materials requested.

If you have any questions or need assistance in planning or conducting a pharmacy visit, please contact APC and we will be glad to help.