

Tyson Mullen - pharmacy

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

“The cutting edge.” Where would one expect to find the cutting edge with the latest in pharmaceutical care? Today we'll meet a young rural Kansas pharmacist who is combining cutting edge technology with old-fashioned customer service. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Tyson and Emily Mullen own and operate Grant County Drug in Ulysses, Kansas. Tyson came into the pharmacy business naturally. “My great-grandfather opened the first drugstore in Wichita County,” Tyson said. “I grew up hearing stories about how he would compound his own medicines and deliver them on horseback.”

Tyson grew up in the rural community of Leoti, population 1,534 people. Now, that's rural.

Tyson found he enjoyed science and math, and he had good mentors who encouraged him toward the medical field. As did his ancestor, he gravitated toward pharmacy. “I believe a pharmacist can impact people and help people on a daily basis,” Tyson said.

His research found that Hutchinson Community College had an excellent track record of preparing people for pharmacy school, so Tyson went there for two years. That was also where he met Emily whom he later married.

Tyson went on to the University of Kansas School of Pharmacy where he was president of his class. He served as a national student representative for the National Community Pharmacy Association and was inducted into Phi Lambda Sigma, the pharmacy national leadership society.

To his great credit, he felt strongly about coming back to western Kansas and maintaining the tradition of independent pharmacy.

After graduation, Tyson worked for a pharmacy in Lakin. In July 2013, Tyson and Emily bought Grant County Drug in Ulysses. Tyson serves as the pharmacist while Emily, who is also trained as a nurse, keeps the books and looks after their two daughters. It is especially exciting to see a young pharmacist take ownership during a time when the average age of pharmacists across Kansas is in the mid- to late-50s.

“My generation is pretty flexible,” Tyson said. “We use technology so much more than our predecessors.” A simple example is sending customers text messages about their needed prescription refills. They also have a system which automatically sends recorded calls using Tyson's voice as refill reminders.

“There is an iPhone app that lets you scan the bar code on the medicine bottle which makes it more convenient to get refills,” Tyson said. He is working on integrating multiple software programs to assist with patient information.

“Studies show people only refill their monthly maintenance medicines eight times a year (rather than the twelve they should have),” Tyson said. “With better information for them, we're taking better care of people.”

He pointed out that pharmacy school has evolved also. “It's not about pills,” Tyson said. “We are moving more toward wellness programs and preventative health,” he said.

Even more exciting scientific developments are on the horizon. “It is possible to do genetic testing with a rapid swab now, which helps us understand individual differences in metabolism,” Tyson said. “That means we can adjust or identify medicines that they will work most effectively for the individual,” he said. Imagine medicines that can be scientifically tailored for each patient.

This is cutting-edge technology being pursued in a rural pharmacy. However, the most important factor for Tyson is still service with a personal touch.

“Unlike the big chain stores, we can take the time to get to know our customers,” Emily Mullen said. “When Mrs. Jones walks in the door, we don’t have to ask, ‘How do you spell your name again?’”

“The conversations are important,” Tyson said. “When I call a patient and learn that a particular medicine upsets their stomach, I can adjust to another product which will serve them better,” he said.

For more information, see www.grantcountydrug.com.

The cutting edge. It is exciting to see a young pharmacist in a rural setting pursue these advances in technology. We commend Tyson and Emily Mullen for making a difference with technology while maintaining the personal touch. This approach provides them a positive edge.

And there’s more. These innovative Kansans also expanded their business next door, and we’ll learn about that next week.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.