PSYCHIATRIC PHARMACISTS:
REDUCING THE GAP
OF THE PSYCHIATRIC SHORTAGE

Adding Great Value to the Team

Dr. Sarah Ward is a psychiatric pharmacist at one of the largest integrated Veterans Affairs (VA) Healthcare Systems in the country. She is one of nine psychiatric pharmacists within the VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System who provides comprehensive medication management services within outpatient, inpatient, and residential rehabilitation mental health settings.

Dr. Ward provides direct patient care to 10 patients in the outpatient setting each day. She works to manage medication side effects, monitor high-risk medications, provide overdose prevention education, and increase access to Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorder.
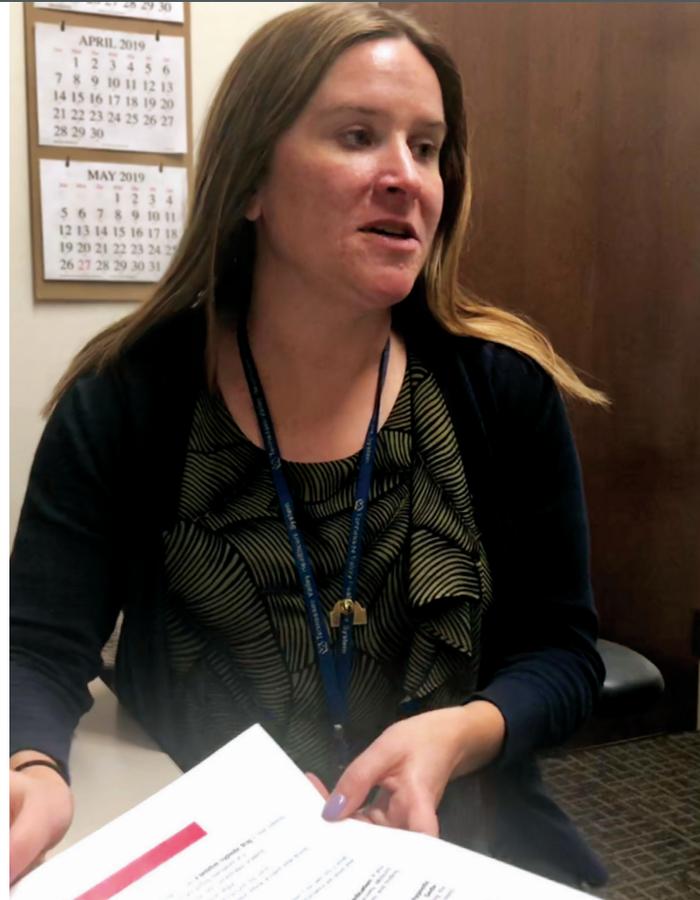
As a provider during prescriber shortages, Dr. Ward's role as a psychiatric pharmacist adds great value to the mental health team. Under a VA scope of practice that allows her to prescribe medications, she initiates, discontinues, and adjusts psychiatric medications.

Sustaining the Need

Last year, the VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System lost multiple psychiatric prescribers. Even though psychiatric pharmacists stepped in to assist, the shock waves of the loss are still felt system-wide.

Dr. Roger Burress, MD, is the Supervisory Psychiatrist for Community Based Outpatient Clinics Mental Health. He finds psychiatric pharmacists, like Dr. Ward, to be invaluable team members in helping to address the growing shortage of psychiatrists that could reach 25% of need by 2025 (HRSA, 2017).

With psychiatric pharmacists as part of the team, the VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System was able to sustain mental health care services to veterans.

> **"Due to unexpected turnover, finding slots in prescriber schedules has been difficult at times. Fortunately, Dr. Ward has been willing to take on these patients."**
>
> *- Roger Burress, MD, Supervisory Psychiatrist for CBOC Mental Health*

IMPROVED
OUTCOMES

Having psychiatric pharmacists as part of their outpatient mental health clinic teams has enabled VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System to:

- **Serve more Veterans**
- **Increase safety measures**
- **Decrease adverse drug reactions**
- **Enhance transitions of care**

Through upgraded facility processes and population management tools like Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorder, the VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System has experienced improved patient outcomes.

10%
increase in MAT for opioid use disorder over 1 year

80x
increase in outpatient Clinical Pharmacy Specialist encounters over 5 years, resulting in more patients seen

40%
improvement in lithium monitoring with pharmacist provided services (2018)

"Psychiatric pharmacists are invaluable members of our mental health teams at the VA. I'm not sure what we would do without them!"

- Jessica Samples, MD, Acting Chief of Psychiatry/ MHCL, Tennessee Valley Healthcare

Amazing Results

Dr. Ward has seen outcomes improve firsthand. Working with patients with bipolar disorder who had not been able to tolerate their current medications, Dr. Ward was able to find better medication choices to more effectively control their symptoms and minimize side effects.

"It's amazing to see how well our Veterans can do on the right medication."
– Dr. Ward

Dr. Ward has also worked with older adults taking benzodiazepines, to reduce their risk of developing side effects such as memory loss and falls. She consulted closely with these patients to taper the benzodiazepine and find safer medications for anxiety and insomnia.

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This information is brought to you by the College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP), a professional association representing more than 2,500 psychiatric pharmacists nationwide. Our members integrate into existing teams of health care professionals, making a difference in overall costs, treatment efficiencies, patient recovery and quality of life.

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