



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW SHARA EVANS

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HEALTH INNOVATION IS HARD TO PREDICT, SO HOW SHOULD PHARMACY ADAPT AS BEST IT CAN?

Specific products may be hard to predict, but if you look at the basic science being done in research labs, then there's a lot of real evidence of where healthcare innovation is likely to take place.

There's way too much for me to go into in an interview, but one innovation that should be on the radar of community pharmacies is custom 3D printing of drugs. As far back as 2013, researchers at the University of Glasgow prototyped a 3D printer capable of assembling chemical compounds at the molecular level. Imagine being able to 3D-print drugs as needed, and in accordance with a patient's specific biology.

Of course, there are many implications here; for instance, pharmaceutical companies may not like this idea at all, as once a CAD [computer aided design] file containing the blueprint for a chemical compound along with 3D printing instructions has been sent out, how do you control revenue? But the benefits to patients would be enormous.

Finding the balance between protecting intellectual property and designing customised healthcare solutions is a place where pharmacies can play a big role.

YOU HELP CLIENTS UNDERSTAND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES. WHAT FRAMEWORK/STRATEGY DO YOU USE?

First and foremost, I use a scientific approach: looking at the developments in research labs across a very wide range of technologies, and extrapolating how these technologies will continue to develop and be used by individuals and businesses, as well as the threats that they may pose in terms of impact on existing revenue streams and products, security, privacy and ethics.

I enjoy talking to scientists, researchers and entrepreneurs from around the world and, where feasible, visiting research labs, seeing and trialling these innovations for myself. I find that getting information first-hand is extremely useful.

Another technique that I use is extrapolating how developments in a particular vertical industry (or technology) can be applied to many different areas.

I also look at various timeline scenarios, and narrow down on the most likely timeframes and scenarios when presenting to audiences. I'm fortunate in that I have an innate ability to see multiple timelines unfolding in parallel, and this has proven really useful in my predictions of how technologies can/will be used, and what the potential pitfalls may be.

HOW CAN A COMMUNITY PHARMACY ENSURE IT IS RELEVANT TO PATIENTS IN THE FUTURE?

I think the future will be about disease prevention and true cures, rather than just putting band-aids on medical problems with pharmaceuticals, although I do believe that pharmaceuticals will play a role in human health for a very long time to come.

Community pharmacies can open themselves up to new professional service opportunities: perhaps being a trusted partner for taking the many sources of healthcare data from wearables and helping clients to interpret and understand what it means to their health.

Already, many pharmacists administer flu shots. With rapid advances in genetic engineering, including many labs that now offer DNA testing of our genetics, another area that community pharmacies could consider is to offer these types of services (collecting DNA samples) on-site, and perhaps helping people understand the implications of their test results. I'm not familiar with medical laws, so I'm not sure if interpreting results would fall into the realm of something that can only be offered by doctors.

Even so, community pharmacies can partner with medical practitioners to offer this type of service, in much the same way as they offer flu shots.

Pharmacies also have an opportunity to further embrace the world of nutrition, and alternative health practices.

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And there are other retail opportunities. Already, most of the pharmacies that I've visited offer a wide range of products. Moving into the future, we will see more and more wearables, sensors that help detect posture, track fitness, and all sorts of things. Pharmacies could become a centre of excellence for all things concerning wellness.

Then there are advances in regenerative medicine, such as stem-cell treatments and genetic engineering. This is more likely to be in the realm of medical practitioners, but pharmacies can play a role in helping clients understand options, and being a source of unbiased scientifically verified information.



APP is the largest pharmacy conference and trade exhibition in Australia. This premier industry event offers attendees a four-day educational program, an exciting networking and social agenda and a trade show, and will be held March 7-10, 2019.