



JLP/DEMOS

THE KEY TO  
*Prosperity* IS  
Specialty

*By Jon Kaup and Johnathan Hamrick*

## Virginia's Prosperity Specialty Pharmacy sets itself apart with multiple programs and a patient-centered approach

**U**pon walking into Frank and Lisa Odeh's Prosperity Specialty Pharmacy, you know right away that you are not entering any ordinary pharmacy. You are not greeted by aisles of OTC merchandise, but instead you walk into a home-like waiting area where you are greeted with friendly and smiling faces.

Frank Odeh graduated with a BS in pharmacy from St. John's University in New York, and worked for more than eight years for a retail chain pharmacy. His career in specialty pharmacy started at Grubb's Pharmacy in Washington D.C., where he focused on HIV/AIDs. His wife Lisa received her BS in pharmacy from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Like her husband, Lisa spent several years working for a retail chain pharmacy and later started working at Leesburg Pharmacy in Leesburg, Virginia.

Frank and Lisa decided that they wanted to own their own pharmacy where they could build patient relationships and a unique level of care and services. In 2003, they opened Prosperity Pharmacy in Fairfax, Virginia, with only one additional employee. Frank was in charge of marketing, where he reached out to local clinics and physicians to build relationships and to get the word out about their pharmacy. Meanwhile, Lisa served as the sole pharmacist working with only one technician. With time their business grew and they began to pursue opportunities to specialize and further expand their business. In 2005, they opened Prosperity

Outpatient Pharmacy in Inova Fairfax Hospital, serving newly discharged hospital patients and hospital employees. By 2007, their specialty services had expanded to the point that they decided to open Prosperity Specialty Pharmacy to allow for growth and better patient care. In 2009, Frank and Lisa opened Prosperity Pharmacy Manassas, which in addition to being a community pharmacy, also serves as their DME center.

Today Frank and Lisa employ more than 50 employees, including 13 pharmacists, 20 pharmacy technicians, a fertility nurse specialist, four full-time and one part-time sales representatives, a two-person billing department, and a human resource officer. Their pharmacies offer a variety of specialties that service not only their community but also patients up and down the East Coast.

### How Did They Do It?

According to Frank, "The first step should be to conduct the necessary market research to understand the services potential patients need and decide how to deliver this to them in a timely, professional manner." In the beginning, fertility was Prosperity's main focus and since then, Frank and Lisa have grown their business by developing other specialties. Prior to entering the fertility business, Frank knew that he was located in a prime market area. Fairfax, Virginia, is part of the Washington D.C., metropolitan area and has a concentration of young professionals that often wait until later in life to start a family. In some circumstances, couples need help conceiving, and there were already numerous fertility clinics in the surrounding area. This is where Frank started his marketing efforts, while Lisa managed the pharmacy. They started slowly, using the one-on-one approach with physicians and fertility clinics, letting them know about the services that Prosperity offered. This allowed them to develop a relationship with and gain the trust of these physicians.

Frank also recommends taking the time to expand education in the specific niche area. "The more you know, the more equipped you will be to educate your patients and the better off your business will be," he says. Frank and Lisa sought out ways to become more educated about infertility, because it is an area that is



not heavily emphasized in pharmacy school curriculums. It required a lot of self-learning. Their primary mode of training was received directly from the nurses and physicians at local infertility clinics. It was through these techniques that Frank and Lisa were able to expand and grow their fertility niche. Once their business was flourishing, they hired a fertility nurse specialist to work in their pharmacy to aid in patient education. Today Prosperity serves fertility patients from Maryland to Florida.

### Seeking Niches

After establishing their fertility niche, Frank and Lisa began to look for other niches that were needed in their area. As Prosperity was centrally located to oncology centers and a transplant hospital, they took advantage of the opportunity to expand into these areas. Since then, Prosperity has branched out into other specialty areas, including compounding, rheumatoid arthritis, HIV, hepatitis C, Crohn's disease, pain management, and immunizations. Lisa said that one of the keys to their success was targeting the patients in their area and educating the physicians on the services that they provide. It's more than just a niche.

"Another key to our success," Lisa says, "is that we do not simply have numerous niches, but that we are committed to our patients having the best possible care and

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service needed. It's going above and beyond for both the patient and physician that makes the difference." One way this personal touch is added at Prosperity is by having a real person answer the phone. People typically get annoyed by automated answering systems. At Prosperity, this is not going to happen. Frank and Lisa believe that this is a way to build patient relationships, and say that they have received a significant number of compliments because of this policy.

At Prosperity, Frank and Lisa implemented a patient-centered care team where they provide extra services to help patients in their time of need. For example, insurance issues can be confusing for patients and they often do not know the options they have. Prosperity prides itself on being insurance advocates. Its staff will help patients understand their coverage and work closely with physician offices to make sure the necessary paperwork is completed and submitted correctly. This includes providing customized forms for physician offices to order prescriptions, and offering account coordinators for support. These account coordinators gather all required information for prior authorizations from the physicians and fill out required processing forms. This process helps free up more time that can be focused on patient care.

### Promoting Adherence

Another program that Prosperity provides is a refill reminder program. With many specialty medications, timing is important and adherence is crucial to optimize

## SPECIALTY PHARMACY TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Frank and Lisa Odeh, owner of Prosperity Specialty Pharmacy in Fairfax, Virginia, offered several tips for entering the specialty pharmacy arena.

- 1. Identify Opportunities.** Start in a small area and find local practitioners/specialists who could become potential areas for business. Find out what they need, and then develop your business to fit those needs and service that provider. Once the kinks are worked out, market the services to other providers in the same specialty.
- 2. Start Slow and Grow.** It is normal in the beginning to have limited staff working on these specialty projects and you may have to do most of the initial work yourself. When the volume picks up you can afford to hire more help, and then you can train them to do specific tasks according to your protocol. If you know every part of the process it also allows you to fix problems down the road. It is not unusual

for this type of business to start out slowly.

- 3. Marketing, Marketing, Marketing.** Many practitioners do not know what you can provide for them. It is important to visit these doctors and show them the type of services you can offer. They will never use your services unless they know about them.
- 4. Be Open to New Ideas.** Pharmacy is always changing and the way you do business is evolving every day. Be open to suggestions from your peers, colleagues, and customers. These insights can be what eventually differentiate you from the competition.
- 5. Get Educated.** In specialty pharmacy, concentrating on different disease states is a crucial segment of the business. Do your own research and look for continuing education in areas in which you want to specialize. It is important to understand every aspect of a certain disease to counsel patients on the drug delivery, dosing, and long-term effects.

patient care. Therefore, pharmacy staff makes phone calls to patients five to seven days before their next refill. These phone calls are not just simple reminders about the refills; the staff person uses this time as an opportunity to discuss any problems the patient may be experiencing. Many times, patients experience side effects or drug interactions throughout therapy, and Prosperity provides counseling for these patients. Prosperity also has counseling rooms available onsite to educate patients in a private setting where they can have individual attention with a health care professional. The specialists at Prosperity are prepared for any questions a patient might have, and are sometimes just an ear for a people experiencing difficulties in trying to understand their treatment.

Prosperity also offers injectable medication education and support to help patients feel more comfortable and at ease with preparing and injecting their medications. They have private, comfortable injection instruction rooms, where patients can learn at their own pace how to prepare the materials and correctly administer the medications. The patients meet one on one with a trained nurse educator or pharmacist who ensures that patients leave the pharmacy prepared to administer their medications at home. Prosperity also provides all needed syringes and medical supplies, including a sharps container for safe disposal of

used needles and other medical waste, and at no extra charge to fertility patients.

On top of these services, Prosperity provides convenient delivery options. Patients can pick up at one of Prosperity's four locations or they can have it delivered, often at no extra charge, to homes, work, doctor's offices, or wherever is convenient. For all of these reasons and more, Frank and Lisa have earned the trust and respect in their community for the services they provide. [ap](#) [ba](#)

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*Editor's Note:* "Profit Pearls" is an occasional series of articles by pharmacy experts in various specialties, offering tips and advice for improving patient care and creating a healthier bottom line. This month focuses on specialty pharmacy and over the counter opportunities.



JOSE LUIS PELAEZ