

Vandel's career marked by public service

By DEBRA BAKER BECK, ALUMNEWS EDITOR

Pharmacy education has undergone several major facelifts as the field grows and changes with all of health care, and distinguished alumnus John Vandel (BS '57) has been at the forefront of most of it.

Vandel, president and manager of Vandel Drugs in Torrington, Wyo., has devoted many long hours to bodies that address pharmacy education needs and helped shape the face of the field's curriculum.

He served on the American Council on Pharmaceutical Education from 1980-1992 and was ACPE's president when the decision was made to require the doctorate of pharmacy (PharmD) as the entry-level degree for professional licensure. Vandel also serves on the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Commission to Implement Change in Pharmacy Education, which developed a model curriculum and is preparing to evaluate its progress.

It's a time-consuming, political process that takes him away from the retail operation he has owned since 1966. But working for the betterment of the field is time well-spent, according to Vandel.

"I feel pharmacy, as a profession, has been good to me and my family," he says, "I felt it was important to give back to the profession."

And "give back" he has. Vandel also serves on the Wyoming Medicaid Committee, the Wyoming Medical Assistance Advisory Committee, the Wyoming Public Health Preventive Task Force, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy, the American Pharmaceutical Association, the Christian Pharmacists Fellowship, and others.

"It did take me out of the pharmacy a lot," he says, "but I was able to bring back a lot of experiences and share them with other pharmacists."

His voluntarism extends to the University of Wyoming as well. Vandel served on the search committee for the associate dean of health sciences for the School of Pharmacy from 1984-85. He also provides an annual Vandel Drug Scholarship and contributes regularly to the School of Pharmacy. Vandel has participated in annual career days at the local high



JOHN VANDEL

school and actively recommends UW to students.

Colleagues recognize Vandel's efforts on behalf of the profession. Over the years, he has received virtually every national honor awarded to community pharmacists, including the Albert E. Rossica, Jr., Memorial Award from the American College of Apothecaries; the Daniel B. Smith Award from the Academy of Pharmacy Practice of the American Pharmaceutical Association; the NABP Distinguished Service Award; and the Wyoming Pharmaceutical Association A.H. Robins Bowl of Hygeia.

Choosing Pharmacy

Vandel, a Torrington native, decided to take up pharmacy while working for a local drug store in high school. The store's pharmacist was a good role model who made the field an attractive one.

UW's pharmacy program was strong, intense program. To fit all of the requirements into four years, Vandel and his classmates took as many as 22 hours some semesters. On top of

that, many of them — including Vandel — worked four eight-hour shifts on nights and weekends in the Bureau of Mines labs. It was a tough schedule, but youth and enthusiasm for his education kept him going.

Mass manufacturing of pharmaceutical products was not yet common; so Vandel spent many hours in compounding class, learning how to prepare medications and make products ranging from toothpaste to talcum powder to ointments. These were some of his favorite courses as a UW student.

Vandel received several job offers when he graduated, but he accepted an assignment as a staff pharmacist for Kellam Drug in Torrington. Vandel anticipated receiving his draft notice; and his wife-to-be, Joyce (BS '57), could be close to family there. The call for military service never came, though, and Vandel took a new position at Edelman Drug. He purchased Edelman from his employer in 1966. He changed the name to Vandel Drug in 1969, after a severe fire destroyed the original location. John and Joyce continue to operate the firm, which has expanded several times. It is now one of the largest retail businesses in Torrington.

Managing a thriving pharmacy would be enough for most people, but Vandel has always found time to serve his community. He currently presides over the Community Hospital Board of Trustees. He has also assisted with the local hospital pharmacy, an operation he set up several years ago. Vandel also has consulted with the local nursing home, though he has since handed over primary responsibility for this project to his daughter, Kerri.

He is a member of the Community Hospital Foundation Board, president of the Torrington Rotary Club, member of the Chamber of Commerce, member of the Goshen County Public Health Advisory Board. Vandel also serves on the Governor's State Medicaid Advisory Board and on the Wyoming Pharmaceutical Association Legislative Committee.

Since Vandel entered pharmacy, the profession has undergone tremendous changes. As the field moved from compounding products in the drug store to mass-produced preparations,

pharmacists shifted their focus to more customer service. Once forbidden to counsel customers regarding their medications, pharmacists are now being encouraged to take a more active role in counseling and interacting with patients.

"That's where I evolved into working in these areas nationally—to promote that and promote pharmacists to get out from behind the counter and interact with patients," Vandel says.

It wasn't an easy transition for some, but "most pharmacists like to counsel once they get into it." Times do change—today, students receive extensive communication training to prepare them to interact effectively with their customers and for their role as professionals.

While many independent retail pharmacies are disappearing and being replaced by chains, he says professionals within the field are finding new ways to get involved in the care of patients. Among the recent trends are pharmacists opening offices and counseling patients on all of their medication concerns and acting as their advocates within the health care system. Others act as consultants on medical teams, making hospital rounds with physicians and making recommendations regarding drug therapy.

"Really, pharmacy is becoming more of an integral part of the health care team," Vandel says.

The next generation has already begun to carry on in service to the profession. Kerri Vandel (BS '81) earned her pharmacy degree then went on to earn her PharmD degree from the University of Minnesota. She currently is employed by the University of Nebraska, where she supervises clinical students in Scottsbluff.

Her father says Kerri selected pharmacy on her own, though he admits to pointing out that it is a good profession for women with many opportunities for advancement.

John and Joyce Vandel have two other children: son Kelley (BS '85) and daughter Kara (who graduated from Oklahoma State University).