

NH 'compounding' pharmacy makes custom medicines

By LORNA COLQUHOUN
Union Leader Correspondent
8 hours, 24 minutes ago

LITTLETON – He was one of those kids who put his chemistry set to good use when growing up and his early experiments, not to mention family tradition, have served him well in his fledgling business.

David Rochefort opened Northern New England Compounding Pharmacy last March, a few months after his family's landmark Main Street pharmacy, Sullivan Drug Store, closed at the end of last year, succumbing to the pressures of the drug industry that independent pharmacists have been feeling for years.

He followed his father, Rich, into a career as a pharmacist. Like many corner drug stores, Sullivan's was more than a place to pick up prescriptions, it was a place to get advice and reassurance about one's health.

When modern medicine did not provide the healing and comfort patients needed, the Rocheforts worked with their doctors to customize medicine, a practice that is known as compounding.

"Compounding is the traditional basis of a pharmacy," said David Rochefort. "Seventy years ago, everything was compounded, and then in the 1940s and '50s, (drugs) were manufactured. They do a great job for 99 percent of the people, but for the other 1 percent, they need something more."

NECP is the only pharmacy in New Hampshire and Maine devoted exclusively to compounding, Rochefort said, although like he and his father at Sullivan Drug, there are many pharmacists who do compounding on a part-time basis. There are about 3,000 compound pharmacies like NECP in the country, according to Joshua Wenderoff, spokesman for the International Academy of Compounding Pharmacists.

"I didn't know anything like this existed," said Kathy Cook of Lincoln, who was referred to Sullivan Drug by North Country Home Health and Hospice in the final days of her mother's battle with cancer a little over a year ago.

"She needed something in her final days to relieve anxiety," Cook said. "They compounded a cream and we would take it and rub it on her neck. It was just wrenching to try to get her to swallow a pill and the cream really did help to relieve her anxiety and help her to relax."

Rochefort works closely with the local hospice agency, inspired by the memory of his grandfather, who died in 1999. About a month before his death, he prepared a skin cream to ease his pain.

"Doing that gave him relief and it gave his family relief," he said. "I thought then, 'This is it -- this is what I want to do.'" He established the pharmacy, appropriately enough, in what was once the lab at the old Littleton Hospital, now known as Mount Eustis Commons.

A typical day is busy, spent filling specialized prescriptions and consulting with physicians and patients all over the country. It is his practice to check in with customers to make sure the medicine is working for them.

Every Wednesday, he takes to the road to meet with doctors across New England and, already this year, he has put in more than 100 hours in continuing education to keep up in the trade.

But most of all, Rochefort said, he likes the people with whom he has crossed paths.

He grew up in his dad's pharmacy. Until it closed, Sullivan Drug Store, established in 1856, was the oldest in New Hampshire -- and it inspired him to follow that path. He graduated in 1997 from the University of Rhode Island College of Pharmacy. In 2001, he was named Distinguished Young Pharmacist by the New Hampshire Pharmacists' Association.

"I always liked chemistry and people and I saw what my dad was doing," he said.

"He never came home angry or stressed -- he was happy -- and this is what I wanted, to go and do this."

One of the biggest markets in compounding is hormone replacement, which appeals to women who want their treatments to include what are called bio-identical hormones, ones that are naturally occurring, as opposed to

commercial treatments.

Pain management is also in demand and Rochefort works with veterinarians to prepare treatments for animals.

"I just made up a transdermal cream for a cat who can't take pills," Rochefort said. "(The pet owner) just has to apply it to the cat's ear."

Because the applications of modern medicine are not always one-size-fits-all, compounding fills the gap.

Rochefort said he has worked with pediatric cardiologists to come up with flavors to deliver vital medicine to children.

"When they take the medication they need, they can go home and live a normal life," he said.

According to the International Academy of Compounding Pharmacists, which has established standards for pharmacists and manufacturers, compounding is regulated by state boards of pharmacy. The academy notes that the ingredients used in compounded medications come from manufacturers licensed by the Food and Drug Administration.

Pharmacists like Rochefort fill a gap in modern medicine, the IACP's Wenderoff said, because there are conditions that require such specialized treatment and the overall demand is too small for large manufacturers to serve those patients.

All trademarks and copyrights on this page are owned by their respective owners. © 1997-2006.