

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



Marta Stybowski

GENERAL MANAGER, PHARMACIUM

Marcela Araneda talks to a specialist in pharmacy design services about her career, first as a pharmacist, then in helping pharmacies improve their business.

Marta, you're an accredited pharmacist as well as GM for Pharmacium.

Can you give our readers a snapshot of your career?

I began my career as a community pharmacist. I moved around a lot and worked in many different pharmacies in various roles, ranging from a few odd shifts up to two-year tenures. This took me from working in one of the most southern pharmacies in Tasmania during a locum period, to time spent in far north Queensland.

I became accredited as a consulting pharmacist and dabbled in community and residential medication reviews for a couple of years. My interest remained in business and I returned to study, undertaking an MBA.

I was fortunate to land a role with Willach as a consulting pharmacist and later as communications manager. In January 2017 I was given the opportunity to move across to our newly launched business division, Pharmacium, and this has allowed me to build on the earlier role at Willach and work with pharmacies to improve their business with design, consulting and training services.

Pharmacium has an interesting history.

Can you share with us how it came to be?

Both our Willach Pharmacy Solutions division in Australia and our parent company in Germany acknowledged there was a need in the market for specialised pharmacy design services that not only addressed the physical layout of the dispensary but took a holistic consultative approach to redesigning the full pharmacy to improve the business operation.

We were touching the tip of the iceberg with provision of dispensary workflow services for our Willach Pharmacy Solutions customers and feedback indicated there was opportunity to do more and in fact make these services available to customers not in the market to buy a robot from Willach.

Based on your experience with automated technology in pharmacy, what would you say are the key issues pharmacists need to think about when considering implementing a robot, for example?

While automation is great and beneficial, it's not a silver bullet, and often delving deeper can reveal inefficiency or ineffectiveness is due to a combination of factors.

I've personally worked with about 150 pharmacies implementing automation, and I'd have to say the 'planning' and 'change management' aspects are generally underestimated (and poorly executed) yet are the backbone for success – not just for implementing automation. Know your objective, do your research, have a plan ... and communicate, communicate, communicate. If this foundation is done right, the transition to automation will be smooth and benefits achieved much faster.

COVID-19 has impacted every business in one way or another. How are your customers dealing with the challenges of today?

To minimise risk, many have split staff into two shifts and also implemented various triaging systems to funnel customers through the pharmacy in

the safest manner, as well as putting in various barriers at service points.

If I can look at a positive that has come out of the COVID-19 crisis, it's that it has brought the topic of electronic prescriptions to the forefront and created a greater sense of urgency for adoption.

How has your business adapted to the challenge of COVID-19?

We're fortunate that our work allowed our team to transition to working from home, and continue to work on both the projects we had in the pipeline before the crisis hit, as well as engage with new clients effectively.

Today's technology is great, and even prior to COVID-19 we used interactive online platforms to have follow-up meetings and design sessions with our remote clients ... so we've simply applied this method to working with all clients at the moment, and it's proving quite effective.

What have you learnt from the COVID-19 experience from a personal and professional level?

I've certainly reflected on how fortunate we are to work in healthcare. My dad always said to us when we were kids that a career in health was reliable, as while people may forgo non-essentials in times of crisis, there would always be a need for healthcare in good times and bad.

On a personal level, I feel this has been somewhat of a 'reset' that's reminded us we can get enjoyment out of the simple things. Our lives are so hectic today that a lot of things are jam packed into an overloaded schedule more for necessity than pleasure.