

NPPA 2015 Conference Review

By Mike Thomas, CPhT, NPPA Editorial & Event Assistant

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This year's National Pharmacy Purchasing Association's (NPPA) 19th Annual Conference was a year of "firsts." First and foremost, the Conference was the largest in recent NPPA History. An impressive 320 Pharmacy & GPO Attendees from across the country flocked to Bally's Las Vegas, to hear the latest in cutting-edge information on pharmacy purchasing, and 89 Pharmaceutical companies crammed the Bally's Grand Ballrooms for our Vendor-Exhibit Hall, to literally full/sold-out capacity. In fact, NPPA normally also sets up an exhibit booth as well, but we relinquished it to make room for other exhibitors.

Two of our Exhibitors especially contributed to helping the attendees get to this year's NPPA Conference: **Reliance Wholesale Inc.** and **US World Meds**, who were both Sponsors of the 2015 Scholarship Program for Under-Funded Attendee-Facilities. With their generous contributions, a total of 20 Pharmacy Buyers who might have otherwise been unable to attend, were given the opportunity to be a part of this event with a Scholarship (for Registration Fee and/or up to 3 Hotel Nights).

However, let us start at the beginning. Even though the official start of the 2015 NPPA Conference was Monday August 17, one of our long-time exhibitors and supporters: Apexus 340B Prime Vendor of Irving, Texas, worked with NPPA this year to hold their 340B University in conjunction with our event, the day before ours began. This 340B University was a daylong seminar and training session that provided practical information about 340B program fundamentals, enabling the attendees to participate with integrity. It was a free benefit for eager, early-bird arrivals, and approximately 250 attended from both Pharmacies as well as Vendor Manufacturing/other companies. Plans are already in motion to hold another 340B University on the day before next year's NPPA Conference, stay posted!

In the early evening on Sunday, after the 340B University concluded, the NPPA Conference held its Sunday Attendee Early Check-In/Registration. The mood was a light, meet-and-greet atmosphere for those able and wanting to avoid the rush of checking in on Monday morning before our sessions began; and giving them the advantage of settling in after their long journeys, or to get a little "Vegas" in before the official start of the event.

Gathering in Bally's Platinum Ballroom for our general lecture hall where our educational portion of the NPPA Conference is held, the attendees were first treated to a full breakfast/brunch buffet which offered many varied selections for all. **Mike Thomas**, CPhT, NPPA Event & Editorial Assistant, kicked off the Opening Session with a history of the Association, and provided some general housekeeping notes along with the help of **Francine Morgano**, NPPA Vice President, Editor & Event Director. Thomas then introduced **Dale Kroll**, NPPA President/CEO & Editor-in-Chief, who gave more on his background as it related to our Association and its roots, including what is now our NPPA member-publication *Pharmacy Purchasing Outlook*.

Then the awardees and nominees were introduced for the Association's highest honor each year: the NPPA Outstanding Buyer of the Year Award Program. This award is given to Pharmacy Buyers who have been identified as leaders in the profession of Pharmacy Purchasing. An impressive 11 nominees were identified, and out of those, **the below NPPA members were chosen for the top 3 placement awards:**

1st Place:

- **Kristi Bernal**, CPhT, Inpatient Pharmacy Buyer, Parker Adventist Hospital, Parker, CO

2nd Place:

- **Christine Muzquiz**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer, Arlington Memorial Hospital, Arlington, TX

3rd Place:

- **Brett Carpenter**, CMRP, CPhT, Senior Pharmacy Buyer, York Hospital-Wellspan Health, York, PA

Each awardee was presented with 2015 Outstanding Buyer of the Year Award Certificates and education/travel prize-awards. Sponsoring the Award Program for the first time this year, was: **Dr. Reddy's Laboratories**, and their representatives were present to congratulate the 3 winners on stage, while handing them their framed Award Certificates. NPPA expresses our gratitude to Dr. Reddy's Laboratories for their generous support of this Award Program and process.

The remaining 8 nominees for this year's Outstanding Buyer, were as follows. We hope you try again next year, it was a close race with so many worthwhile candidates!

- **Mark Anaya**, CPhT, Pharmacy Systems Analyst, San Luis Valley Health Regional Medical Center, Alamosa, CO
- **Sandra Avery**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer/Supply Coordinator, CarolinaEast Medical Center, New Bern, NC
- **Megan Faust**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer, Saint Francis Hospital, Wilmington, DE
- **April Friedlander Floyd**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer, Redmond Regional Medical Center, Rome, GA
- **Whitney Grover**, RPhT, Pharmacy Buyer, Saint Francis Memorial Hospital, San Francisco, CA
- **Rakesh Khandelwal**, Senior Pharmacy Procurement Coordinator, MedStar Washington Hospital Center, Washington, DC
- **Jody Meling**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer, Walla Walla General Hospital, Walla Walla, WA
- **Jim Thomas**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer, Faith Regional Health Services, Norfolk, NE

Watch for the opening of next year's 2016 Outstanding Buyer Award Program, this December (2015), which will be announced in our December *Pharmacy Purchasing Outlook* edition, as well as on our website's home page in the "What's New" section on the right. Any Pharmacy Buyer that is a current NPPA member through the month of August in the year in question, is qualified to be nominated, or can nominate themselves.

At this time, Thomas relinquished the moderator duties to ProCE, Inc. President **Richard Lewis**, who continued with the educational portion of the NPPA Conference. ProCE handles the management and processing of our event's ACPE-accredited CE for the educational lectures. This year, we had up to 12.75 total CE units available, for *both* Buyer-Technicians as well as Pharmacists (*actually just 30 minutes of that total was only available for Buyer-Technicians*). The total ACPE-accredited CE also included a couple of lectures to address the required Pharmacy "Law" CE; as well as one session that offered the more newly required "Patient Safety" CE.

Starting off was **Leslie Binder**, MAMFT (Marriage & Family Therapist), Pharmacy Buyer II, from Meyer Orthopedic & Rehabilitation Hospital (a Cox Health System facility) in Springfield, Missouri, whose topic was: "***Chilling Out When Your Feet Are To The Fire: Managing Workplace Stress.***" The presentation was a light but welcomed stress-reliever session, where Ms. Binder discussed both stressors as well as simple and even interesting things to do, in order to help alleviate the stressors. She even passed out mini-chocolates to all in the audience as an example of one such solution, about how to integrate "mindfulness" into your daily routine to assist in relaxing from stress.

Next, the **5 current NPPA Advisory Board Members** (representatives of the Association who offer their perspectives and advice to NPPA), spoke on a joint presentation with each of them sharing their perspective on the subject: "***Let's Build a Pharmacy Team": Staff Relations, Leadership & Purchasing Duties.***" They are as follows:

- **Debby Flannery**, CPhT, Pharmacy Purchasing Coordinator, Eisenhower Medical Center, Rancho Mirage, CA;
- **Deb Harden**, Pharmaceutical Buyer, The Christ Hospital, Cincinnati, OH;
- **Nina Karl**, CPhT, Pharmacy Purchasing Coordinator, Providence St. Patrick Hospital, Missoula, MT;
- **Vicki Wernes**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer, Franciscan Alliance St Anthony Health, Crown Point, IN;
- **Leanne Witt**, CPhT, Pharmacy Inventory Specialist & 340B Coordinator of Western Region, Mercy Hospital-Springfield, MO.

Then **Lyle Matthews**, PharmD, MAM, Director of Pharmacy Services from Redlands Community Hospital in Redlands, CA, returned to the NPPA Conference with his presentation: "***Working With The Pharmacy Director For Buyer Support & Partnership.***" Dr. Matthews is both a long-time supporter and fan of NPPA, as well as a fan "favorite" with the Conference, having spoken with us once before as well. Dr. Matthews' lectures are always both educational *and* motivational. Many in the audience Q&A portion were even asking if he needed to hire any new Buyers to work with him!

Barbara Hintzen, BA, CPhT, 340B Pharmacy Supervisor of North Memorial Medical Center in Robbinsdale, MN, presented a "nuts-and-bolts" discussion on: "***Identifying & Tracking Pharmacy Cost Savings,***" a subject near and dear to every Pharmacy Buyer present. Ms. Hintzen's lecture stressed the importance of the entire Pharmacy Staff taking ownership of cost savings, not just the Pharmacy Buyer.

The final presentation of the day was given by **Whitney Grover**, RPhT, Pharmacy Buyer at St. Francis Memorial Hospital (a part of Dignity Health System) in San Francisco, CA, who presented a panelist discussion on: *"Going Green in the Pharmacy,"* a waste management talk with emphasis on the responsibility of keeping in mind the earth's ecology, and the responsibility of the Pharmacy Buyer to keep in mind the impact of Pharmacy Waste on the environment.

After a long first day of lectures, the attendees then adjourned to the Sky-View Ballroom on the 26th Floor, where our official Opening Reception was waiting for them. The attendees were treated to a sumptuous Las Vegas-style buffet, libations, and great conversation.

Day Two began with a full breakfast buffet. Moderator Richard Lewis then introduced the day's opening speaker: **Christopher R. Fortier**, PharmD, FASHP, Chief Pharmacy Officer at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, MA, and his presentation: *"Lessons Learned from a DEA Drug Diversion & Compliance Audit of a 1,000-Bed Hospital Pharmacy."* Dr. Fortier discussed the processes in keeping the Pharmacy's Controlled Substance inventory, secure, and the problems with diversion and accountability. This lecture qualified as a CE for the needed Law Credit for PTCB and local recertification, where necessary.

Richard Ponder, MBA, CMRP, CPhT, CPP, CEPP, Senior Advisor of Advisory Services from VHA Inc., in Irving, TX, returned to the Conference to discuss: *"Improving Communications Between GPO's & Pharmacy Buyers."* Being a former Pharmacy Buyer himself, a representative working for a couple of different GPO's (now with VHA Inc., part of Novation), a speaker at several other conventions, and one of NPPA's past Advisory Board Members, Mr. Ponder was more than qualified to discuss techniques to improve communication between GPO's and Pharmacy Buyers.

The attendees took a break from the formal lectures and gathered at their respective GPO Breakout Session meeting rooms, to learn the latest innovations from their facility's Group Purchasing Organization (GPO) and to discuss specific issues with its representatives. This year's participating & supportive GPOs were: Amerinet, Novation, MedAssets, and Premier.

After a lunch break, the attendees returned to Bally's Platinum Ballroom for the second half of the day's sessions. **Sherrie L. Lane**, PD, Inpatient Pharmacy Supervisor of Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System (the **Eugene Towbin** Healthcare Center and **John L. McClellan** Memorial Veterans Hospital in Little Rock, AR), presented on: *"True Grit" – Developing Legal, Ethical & Cost-Effective Generic Buying Practices For Your Pharmacy.* For this presentation, Ms. Lane provided ways to keep abreast of brand-to-generic conversions, discussing these changes with your staff, and setting a blueprint for sound generic purchasing.

To wrap up Day Two, **Molly Billstein Leber**, PharmD, BCPS, Pharmacy Manager of Drug Use Policy at Yale New Haven Hospital in New Haven, CT, explored the topic of: *"Biosimilars & Other New Medications on the Horizon."* While the subject of new medications is addressed often and always popular, the topic of Biosimilars is one just now coming into prominence in American Pharmacy Practice. Although still a brand-new concept, NPPA has actually included the topic of Biosimilars in our Conference's educational lectures for the past several years, keeping NPPA members ahead of the curve. Each year our attendees learn more in this new area of Pharmacy Practice, as our knowledgeable presenters share the newest information.

It was then time for the attendees to meet the 89 Exhibiting Vendor-Companies and their participating representatives, in the first of two days of our Vendor Exhibit Hall (Tuesday August 18), where Buyers had the advantage of speaking one-to-one with the vendor companies they do business with. This is one of the most important times at the NPPA Conference, as some Buyers do not have this advantage, or do not have sufficient time to interface with vendors at their worksites. In some cases, companies were displaying that may not have been familiar to all the Buyers present, so those representatives took the opportunity to introduce their products and services to new potential purchasers of their products. National account managers and even company presidents, were also there to establish personal connections with their customers. The advantage of this vendor interaction can serve a Pharmacy Buyer well, especially when local sources or contacts are unable to solve day-to-day problems a Buyer may encounter throughout the year.

As an incentive for attendees to visit and stay in the Exhibit Hall for the full amount of time allowed each day, a “mystery gifter” (not associated with NPPA staff or attendees), was charged to seek out **4 Buyer Attendees in each Exhibit Hall day**, and reward them with a door prize of a **\$100 American Express Gift Card**, just for being present. (*In the second Exhibit Hall day, an additional 4 Amex Gift Cards were also presented as door prizes, which will be included in Part 2 of this Review.*) **During Tuesday’s Exhibit Hall, the lucky and grateful recipients were as follows:**

- **Hemali Joshi**, the Pharmacy Procurement Analyst at OhioHealth Doctor’s Hospital in Columbus, Ohio;
- **Tara Kinsman**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer at Wyoming Medical Center in Casper, Wyoming;
- **Christine Adkison**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer at Island Hospital in Anacortes, Washington;
- **Nick Inuma** CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer & Inventory Control Coordinator at White Memorial Medical Center in Los Angeles, California.

After the Exhibit Hall hours ended on Tuesday at 5:30pm, the day officially concluded, and Attendees & Exhibitors were then free to go to dinner, take in a Vegas show, or tour the Strip, until the next morning’s sessions began again.

On Day Three (Wednesday August 19), after attendees were served a full breakfast buffet, Conference Moderator and NPPA Editorial & Event Assistant **Mike Thomas**, CPhT, once again assumed his duties at the Lecture Hall podium.

Robert Milnes II, PharmD, BCPS, CGP, Pharmacy Director at Ashtabula County Medical Center in Ashtabula, Ohio, started Wednesday’s session with: **“Drug Supply Chain Security Act (DSCSA): Current & Future Implications for the Pharmacy Buyer.”** His discussion described the new Drug Supply Chain Security Act (DSCSA) and how it will deal with counterfeiting and diversion in pharmacy. This presentation qualifies for Pharmacy “Law” CE requirement, necessary for PTCB recertification.

Next, **Sherrie L. Lane**, PD, Inpatient Pharmacy Supervisor, Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System at the Eugene Towbin Healthcare Center North Little Rock and John McClellan Memorial Veterans Hospital in Little Rock, Arkansas, presented on: “**Ground Zero: Leveraging Pharmacy Automation & Standardized Buying Practices To Increase Patient Safety.**” Dr. Lane described the different types of Pharmacy automation and how these affect buying practices, focusing on patient safety. This presentation qualified for the “Patient Safety” CE requirement, which is now necessary for pharmacy license recertification.

The attendees took a break from the formal lectures and gathered at their respective Drug Wholesaler Breakout Sessions, to learn the latest innovations from their companies and discuss issues with each of the participating company’s representatives: AmerisourceBergen, Cardinal Health, and McKesson.

After a lunch break, the attendees were given a presentation from one of the Conference’s veterans, **Chris Saboura**, RPh, MBA, Redmond Regional Medical Center, Rome, Georgia, who discussed: “**The ABC’s Of Inventory Control & Management.**” Mr. Saboura discussed the differentiation between the various inventory valuation methods, while describing the inventory control doctrine elements and demand predictability, and finally outlining strategies to assess drug shortages.

It was then time once again for the attendees to meet the 89 Exhibiting Vendor-Companies and their participating representatives in the second and final day of our Exhibit Hall, where Attendees had the advantage of speaking one-to-one with the companies they do business with. This is one of the most important sessions at our event, as some Pharmacy Buyers rarely have this advantage, or at least don’t have sufficient time to interface with vendors at their worksites. In some cases, companies were displaying that may not have been familiar to all the Buyers present, so those representatives took the opportunity to introduce their products and services to new potential purchasers of their products. Additionally, national account managers and even company presidents were there to establish personal connections with their customers. The advantage of this vendor interaction can serve a Buyer well, especially when local sources or contacts are unable to solve day-to-day problems a Buyer may encounter throughout the year.

Then once again, as an incentive for attendees visiting the Exhibit Hall for the full amount of time allowed each day, a “mystery gifter” (*not associated with NPPA staff, attendees, or vendors*), was charged to seek out 4 Buyer Attendees in each Exhibit Hall day, and reward them with a door prize of a **\$100 American Express Gift Card**, just for being present. ***During Wednesday’s Exhibit Hall, the lucky and grateful recipients were as follows:***

- 1) **Jesus Rodriguez**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer at Doctor’s Center-Bayamon, Vega Baja, Puerto Rico;
- 2) **Kate Tyler**, CPhT, Outpatient Pharmacy Specialist/Buyer at St. Cloud Hospital, St. Cloud, MN;
- 3) **Yvonne Nelson**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer at Community Medical Center, Missoula, MT;
- 4) **Nishon Jones**, CPhT, Analyst II/Pharmacy Buyer at University of California Davis Medical Center, Sacramento, CA.

After the final Exhibit Hall hours ended at 5:30pm, Attendees & Exhibitors were free to go to dinner, take in a Vegas show, or tour the Strip, until the next morning’s sessions began again. Others returned to their rooms, exhausted from the day’s activities, and loaded down with pens, totes, and anything and everything company representatives were legally allowed to provide.

On Thursday August 20 (the final day), the first session was: “*Cross-Training for Pharmacy Buyer Coverage*,” by returning presenter **Robert Milnes II**, PharmD, BCPS, CGP, the Pharmacy Director at Ashtabula County Medical Center in Ashtabula, Ohio, accompanied by **Paula Wellings**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer at the same facility. Of all the business aspects discussed at this Conference, this lecture could perhaps be deemed the most vital of all, since no matter how experienced and talented a Buyer may be, they simply cannot be on-call 24/7, 365 days/year. It is important to the smooth flow of work responsibilities, as well as the sanity of the primary Buyer, that at least one, if not all the Distributive Staff have some proficiency in performing the duties of the Pharmacy Buyer when that person cannot be available for duty, be it a personal issue, vacation, or an illness.

The final presentation of the Conference was given by **Allen Sutherland**, CPhT, Senior & Regional Pharmacy Buyer at St. Joseph's Hospital & Medical Center/Dignity Health in Phoenix, Arizona, on: “*Career Growth & Leadership - Regional Pharmacy Buyer Meetings*.” Allen impressed upon the attendees that Association growth should not only be centralized, but spread out in the grassroots of the profession; that regional meetings are vital to our national growth and each and every member of NPPA should consider stepping up into a leadership position for their region, to organize their own occasional meetings among the hospitals in their area (as Allen has been so successful at doing for the past few years in the Phoenix, Arizona area).

Finally it was time for attendees to speak up, at an informal “Attendee Feedback Session.” Here, attendees critiqued the Conference and the Association, and offered suggestions for future. With the end of our Feedback Session, the 19th Annual 2015 NPPA Conference came to a close, and everyone returned to their facilities, armed with the knowledge to change their pharmacies for the better.

With an undertaking this large, it would be ludicrous to think this was done only by the people you see. The NPPA Annual Conference is the work of many, many dedicated individuals, whose unique skills and capabilities are vital to the operation of the Conference. Our onsite staff included our Exhibitor Management team from Event Consultants Global LLC, with special thanks to **Lorraine Gibson** for her hard-work all year leading up to the show as well. Thanks must be given to **Allen Sutherland**, Contracted Marketing Assistant, who came aboard just recently to talk up the Association with the vendors that call on him as well as at other regional and national Pharmacy meetings. Allen has a wealth of experience and contacts, being a long-time Pharmacy Buyer and member of NPPA and one of our past Advisory Board Members.

Cathy Ravy, CPhT, a now-retired Buyer from UCSD Medical Center in San Diego, has been vital to our staff as a regular part-time employee, lending a hand from time-to-time throughout the year and more so in our busy Conference season, both in the office as well as onsite in Vegas. Most of our members and customers have communicated in some way with **Jonathan Hewlett**, Office & Advertising Manager and Event Assistant, who handles our advertising, memberships, database management, Attendee Conference Registration, internal sales & general Conference coordination, as well as keeping the office on an even keel.

Dale Kroll, even though now working remotely from his home in Hemet, CA (1.5 hours from NPPA's office), is not as involved in day-to-day activities as he once had been, however as President/CEO & Editor-In-Chief, he still oversees the overall workings of our Association. However, the leviathan behind NPPA is **Francine Morgano**, Vice President, Event/Marketing Director & Editor, who personally oversees every aspect of NPPA: managing our member-publication *PPO* 10 times a year, coordinating the speaker roster for our Annual Conference, overseeing the minutia of the hotel facilities and services, and making sure the business side of the company stays running. Each person is a cog in the wheel of a long-standing machine, each with their own responsibilities, each very good at what they do. Often, you never see or hear from these individuals, until you need them! (And myself, **Mike Thomas**, CPhT, ex-Pharmacy Buyer/Technician now NPPA's Editorial & Event Assistant.)

Thanks must be given again to the 89 Exhibiting companies at this year's NPPA Conference, who took the time to join us in order to attend to the needs and establish relationships with their clients, our Pharmacy Attendees. As well as this year's Exhibitors who *also sponsored* events or items, as follows.

- 340B University: **Apexus/340B Prime Vendor**
- Badge Lanyards: **X-Gen Pharmaceuticals**
- Cyber Café: **Precision Dose, Inc./TAGI Pharma**
- Notepads & Pens: **Fresenius Kabi USA, LLC**
- Outstanding Buyer of the Year Award Program: **Dr. Reddy's Laboratories**
- Scholarship Program for Under-Funded Attendee-Facilities:
Reliance Wholesale, Inc., and US WorldMeds
- Tote Bags: **Claris Lifesciences**

But most important, we especially thank the *record-breaking 320 Pharmacy Attendees* who took the time from their very busy schedules to enhance their own skills, and to interface with their peers.

Looking to the future, next year's Annual Conference will be a milestone for the Association, as it will be our 20th! Dates are: **August 22 or 23,* through 25**, 2016, returning to Bally's LV. *Note a *possible* change to our normal date pattern & total length: to start *Tuesday* (instead of Monday), *through end* of Thursday (instead of by Noon). To be determined as soon as possible. Also, note that Apexus may be returning to again host a 340B University to coincide with our event, on the day before NPPA's official start day (currently still to be determined).

Mark your calendars now, for the week of August 22-25, 2016, to join NPPA and your fellow colleagues, for our historic 20th Annual event! Registration is expected to open in January or February 2016.

