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NPPA 2016 Conference Review, Parts I & II

By Michael J.W. Thomas, CPhT & Dale J. Kroll

This is a special review of a landmark event for our organization, National Pharmacy Purchasing Association (NPPA). Twenty years ago, a Pharmacy Contract Manager by the name of **Dale J. Kroll**, President/CEO & Founder of NPPA, came up with the then unheard of notion that the Pharmacy Buyers of the country needed a place and organization, to enhance their skills and share information and ideas with colleagues.

Twenty years later, the 20th Annual NPPA Conference, held at Bally's Las Vegas this August 23-25, 2016, has now become the premier meeting for Pharmacy Buyers in the country. With a record-breaking 324 pharmacy purchasing attendees, and an equally impressive 98 pharmaceutical companies with 430 of their sales representatives on hand to address the needs of their customers.

However, let us rewind a bit, to discuss how NPPA's Conferences first began, and to see just how far we've come since then. The first meeting 20 years ago in March of 1997, was a 1-day event with 60 Pharmacy Attendees and 15 Vendors with Exhibit Tables or Sponsorships, held at what was then the Flamingo Hilton in Las Vegas (now just known as Flamingo Las Vegas, and a Caesars Entertainment property, no longer owned by Hilton).

Before NPPA's Conferences even came to be, Dale would drive cross country on an "Outlook Tour" for 3-4 weeks, speaking with any Buyer who would give him time out of their hectic schedule to discuss the opportunities he had to offer, both through his newly-found publication, and the formation of his national network. Through this method, he was lucky to meet with 15 or so Buyers, not very effective for the amount of time and effort put in. After one of these trips, Dale thought of the concept of a central location where all would travel, with Las Vegas being one of the most economical travel destinations for everyone in the country, and also somewhat close to our company which is based in San Diego.

Nowadays, the NPPA Conference has expanded its scope by adding Apexus' 340B University, held in conjunction with our event on the day before the NPPA Conference begins, in the same hotel. The 340B University offers both the novice and the seasoned 340B Manager basic instructions and the latest developments in this government program. There are significant changes to this 340B program each year, so it's very beneficial for those who participate and manage this program to be well-informed about such changes. This year, the Apexus 340B University was held on Monday August 21, and Apexus reported to us that they also had record-breaking attendance, when compared to their other day-long events when held in Las Vegas.

After the 340B University ended for the day, the NPPA Conference informally began, with Early Attendee Check-In available along with being treated to a "Meet & Greet" Reception, which provided attendees with 3 complimentary drinks at the bar and happy hour/light dinner food, over the space of 2 hours. It was decided that having a Reception at the same time as the Early Attendee Check-In, would work well to allow attendees already in town the opportunity to pickup their materials early (before the rush first thing the next morning), as well as to unwind from their travels to chat with existing and meet new colleagues over food & drink.

Tuesday August 23 at 8:30am then began with an Opening Session by NPPA to briefly orient new attendees about NPPA's background and what to expect onsite. Then directly afterwards began the formal Educational Sessions that come with ACPE-accredited CE, which started with a presentation by **Lyle Matthews**, Pharm.D., MAM, Director of Pharmacy Services at the Redlands Community Hospital in Redlands, California. His keynote presentation was on: *"Decreasing Buyer Stress Through Identifying & Managing The Issues That Cause It,"* which was both educational and motivational, mixing helpful stress-relieving tools and humor. Dr. Matthews also served as Moderator for all the educational sessions for the rest of the Conference from there forward.

Next in the educational lineup, **Christine Muzquiz**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer/Lead Technician and **Rex Schimpf**, MS., RPh, Pharmacy Director, both from Arlington Memorial Hospital in Arlington, Texas, conducted a co-presentation on *"Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Audits in Pharmacy."* This very important lecture guided attendees on proper techniques in handling materials that may be harmful, and how to protect their co-workers and the environment. This presentation qualified for the Pharmacy "Law" CE requirement as mandated by ACPE (the Accreditation Council of Pharmacy Education).

After these first morning sessions, attendees then adjourned to their respective GPO (Group Purchasing Organization) Breakout Sessions, where their facility's group purchasing executives were there to bring attention to their latest developments and services, and to answer questions from the audience. The GPO's in attendance were: HealthTrust, Intalere (*the "old" Amerinet*), Premier, and Vizient (*includes the "old" MedAssets & Novation, now both known as Vizient*).

After lunch, **Patrick Gallagher**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer/Technician at Marian Medical Center, Santa Maria, California gave his presentation on: *"Anatomy of a Pharmacy Buyer."* Gallagher's presentation gave attendees a perspective on what they already knew, but most likely didn't realize it optically in the form as it was presented.

NPPA President Dale Kroll then took the stage once again. Although he gave a brief greeting and some background about NPPA during the Opening Session, he was now given the opportunity to share in more detail the events and experience he had in the past that led to the genesis of NPPA. He also recounted his early days where shyness sometimes stood in his way of career and professional growth as well as in personal interactions. He encouraged the more reticent in the audience to take advantage of courses in public speaking such as are available through groups like Toastmasters® and Dale Carnegie®, as he had done. Such training made him open up and not be as shy to speak out in the professional world as well as personal, and to be a more effective (and less nervous) public speaker.

Then Dale recognized the NPPA Members & Conference Attendees who were in attendance for the 1st Annual Conference in 1997 that were also present this year (20 years later), and asked them to say a few words to either share an anecdote or what they've learned from our show or being a member. After that, he also highlighted additional long-time supportive NPPA Members & Conference Attendees, who also shared some stories with the rest of the audience.

From there, a vendor representative from **Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, Inc.** of Princeton, New Jersey, who returned for a second year as the Sponsor of NPPA's Outstanding Buyers of the Year Award Program, presented this year's Awardees with a commemorative plaque and monetary remuneration. Each Awardee said a few words to the audience about their recognition and/or a relatable story about their job or involvement with NPPA. Photos were then taken of each Awardee with a Dr. Reddy's representative and NPPA President Kroll, some of which can be viewed on our website's page titled "Outstanding Buyer Program" (*with more photos also available on our "Flickr" photo album from this year's Conference, as found from our website's Home Page*). The 2016 NPPA Outstanding Buyer of the Year Awardees are as follows.

1st Place (awarded \$1,000 for education/travel):

- **Pamela Kindall**, Pharmacy Purchasing Specialist, North Arkansas Regional Medical Center, Harrison, Arkansas

2nd Place (awarded \$500 for education/travel):

- **Linda K. Nelson**, Corporate Pharmacy Buyer, Shriners Hospital for Children, Tampa, Florida

3rd Place (awarded \$200 for education/travel):

- **Bell Hoy**, CPhT, Pharmacy Purchasing Manager, The Ohio State University Medical Center, Columbus, Ohio

The 1st Place Awardee Pamela Kindall's supervisor, **Joshua Bright**, PharmD, Director of Pharmacy Services, was also on hand to extend his congratulations and share a word. Dr. Bright even surprised Ms. Kindall by coming out to the show, as she thought he was still working back in Arkansas at the time. Then upon returning to the office after the 2016 NPPA Conference ended, the CEO of Pamela's facility authorized a community-wide reception for her in the first week of October, which they are promoting as being open to their local business and community leaders, and being announced in their local newspaper beforehand.

To wrap up Tuesday's program, attendees were then invited to the first day of the NPPA Exhibit Hall, where 98 vendors and their representatives were able to speak with their pharmacy customers on a one-to-one basis. Towards the end of the 3-hour long Exhibit period, 4 lucky attendees walking the Hall at that time were presented with a \$50 American Express Gift Card from NPPA (which is done on both Exhibit Hall days). The chosen attendees were picked by one of the security guards that watch the entrance of our Exhibit Hall, so as not to be associated with any of our attendees, out of fairness. The lucky winners for Tuesday's first day of Exhibits, are as follows.

- 1) **Brooke Richards**, CPhT, Corporate Pharmacy Sourcing & Purchasing Analyst at Comprehensive Pharmacy Services (CPS) in East Waterboro, Maine
- 2) **Maurice Mason**, Pharmacy Buyer at Sharp Memorial Hospital in San Diego, California
- 3) **Laura Lancaster**, Senior Pharmacy Buyer at Intermountain Healthcare in Midvale, Utah
- 4) **Lori Robbins**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer at Baylor, Scott & White Medical Center in Grapevine, Texas

Before the official start of the CE sessions on the second day of the Conference, Wednesday August 24, we started with the usual full breakfast as sponsored by NPPA, and then went straight to business with the first CE lecture.

The first educational session was presented by **Molly Billstein Leber**, PharmD, BCPS, FASHP, Manager of Medication Policy & Formulary Management, at Yale-New Haven Hospital, in New Haven, Connecticut. Her presentation was on: *“Managing Drug Shortages,”* where she offered vital information on the “how” her facility handles shortages, such as their origins, methods of coping, etc. What made this presentation unique for the attendees was that Ms. Billstein-Leber presented useful information on how to keep on top of their shortages by identifying sources that keep abreast of medication shortages, helping buyers with an “early warning system” to avoid potential problems.

Keeping in the theme of pharmaceutical projections, **L. Ross Day**, RPh, Director of Pharmacy Sourcing Operations at Vizient Inc. in Irving, Texas gave an insightful presentation on: *“Importance of Successful Commercialization of Biosimilars to Hospitals.”* Here, Ross identified the financial impact this new category of drug, and the necessary steps needed to convert these drugs from their proprietary equivalents to their bioequivalent counterparts. Projecting into the future, the speaker identified the new and upcoming products that Pharmacy Buyers can alert their departments, both their Director and/or their Clinical Coordinator, of these upcoming changes.

After the morning sessions, attendees then took the opportunity to assemble at their respective Wholesaler’s Breakout Session, where their facility’s wholesaler representatives were on hand to bring attention to their latest developments and services, and to answer questions from the audience. This year’s participating Wholesalers were: AmerisourceBergen, Cardinal Health, and McKesson.

After the lunch break and a bit of free time, where attendees had time to stretch their legs and enjoy the lunch food options available at Bally’s or Paris, they returned to hear the new USP regulations presented by **Dante Kazerounian**, PharmD, CPh, NPh, Pharmacy Sterile Compounding Manager, from All Children’s Hospital at Johns Hopkins Medicine in St. Petersburg, Florida. His presentation: *“Sterile Compounding & Hazardous Drug Handling in Pharmacy (USP Chapter 800)”* explained the ins and outs of the new USP Chapter 800 regulations, and explained the features of the Law; also how to protect yourself from the hazardous drug gaps in your practice area. This presentation qualified for the Pharmacy “Law” CE requirement as mandated by ACPE (the Accreditation Council of Pharmacy Education).

Next, **Pam Bacon**, RPh, MBA, GPO Field Pharmacist, from MedAssets/Vizient Inc., Centennial, Colorado joined **Angela Loftus**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer, and **Amber Johnston**, PharmD, Central Ops Pharmacy Manager, both from Nebraska Medicine-Omaha and Bellevue in Nebraska, co-presented on: *“Tracking Cost Savings in Pharmacy - What Have You Done For Me Lately?”* The trio explained their process to track costs, and to involve their staff in helping curb costs.

It was then time to once again visit the Exhibit Area, interacting with the vendors the Buyers had not had time to meet the previous day. With a staggering 98 companies exhibiting on the display floor, the attendees needed the time to discuss their issues, which each representative, who were more than eager to interact with them.

As an added bonus in the Exhibit Hall, **Mila Albert**, PharmD, Procurement Manager at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center in Chicago, Illinois, offered attendees walking the hall access to her very detailed Poster Presentation, on: *“Implementation of FDA Drug Supply Chain Security Act (CSCA) in Hospital Pharmacy.”*

As with the previous day's Exhibit Hall period, towards the end of the 2.5-hour long timeframe, 4 lucky attendees walking the Hall at that time were presented with a \$50 American Express Gift Card from NPPA. The chosen attendees were picked by one of the security guards that watch the entrance of our Exhibit Hall, so those choosing the winners did not know any of our attendees; out of fairness (they were only looking for the Attendee's badge color to identify them as different from the GPO executives and Vendor-Exhibitors present. The lucky winners for Wednesday's Exhibits are as follows:

- 1) **Gerri Bray**, Pharmacy Buyer/Technician at Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital in Santa Rosa, CA;
- 2) **Valerie Pickens**, Pharmacy Buyer at UnityPoint Health-Methodist in Peoria, IL;
- 3) **Gina Rodriguez**, CPhT, 340B Government Pharmacy Coordinator at Christus Spohn South Hospital in Corpus Christi, TX;
- 4) **Rene Rodriguez**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer, Glendale Adventist Medical Center in Glendale, CA.

Then, the second day of the NPPA Conference educational sessions came to an end, and attendees were given the opportunity to enjoy the nightlife of Vegas.

On the third and final day of the Conference (Thursday August 25), we began with another full breakfast. Then **Kimberly S. New**, JD, BSN, RN, from the International Health Facility Diversion Association in Knoxville, Tennessee presented on: *“Diversion by Pharmacy Personnel: Understanding the Unique Challenges.”* Being both a nurse and a lawyer, Ms. New gave the attendees the unique perspective of drug diversion from an institutional atmosphere, as well as a governmental aspect. This presentation qualified for the Pharmacy “Law” CE requirement as mandated by ACPE (the Accreditation Council of Pharmacy Education).

The last educational session was then given by **Mary Range**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer from College Medical Center in Long Beach, California, a first-time speaker. Her presentation: *“Chapter 797 Rules For Pharmacy Medications (Sterile Handling, Storage & Distribution)”* gave the attendees the perspective of a Pharmacy Buyer who also functions as a hands-on Pharmacy Technician, and who has proficient knowledge of both.

This was then the end of the Conference's 3 days of listening to expert speakers lecture in their respective fields for ACPE-accredited CE units available for recertification of both Buyer-Technicians as well as Pharmacists.

Next was the *“Grand Prize”* giveaway as sponsored by NPPA, of two \$100 American Express Gift Cards to current NPPA members still in attendance at that time after the last CE session ended on the last Conference day, as chosen by a random drawing of numbered tickets. The 2 lucky winners were as follows:

- 1) **Pamela Herold**, CPhT, Pharmacy Regulatory Compliance Technician, Redlands Community Hospital in Redlands, CA;
- 2) **Rene Rodriguez**, CPhT, Pharmacy Buyer, Glendale Adventist Medical Center in Glendale, CA.

After the Grand Prize giveaway, it was the Attendees' turn to share issues and experiences with each other, in order to get their fellow pharmacy purchasing colleagues' opinions and perspectives/ideas.

Lastly, it was then time to hear from our own experts, the staff of NPPA, in the **“Attendee Feedback Session.”** A few of the NPPA staffers took the stage to field questions regarding the experiences the attendees had at the Conference or with their NPPA membership, and to share the future activities of the organization, such as the coming introduction of a new website and planning for next year’s event.

Although the Conference was an exciting 4-day event in total for the staff at NPPA (beginning on Monday the first day, with our **“Meet & Greet Reception”** and the Apexus 340B University held in conjunction with our event), the Conference never ends. Plans are already in motion for next year!

The 21st Annual NPPA Conference will once again be held at Bally’s Las Vegas in August, the week of Monday August 21 through Thursday August 24. Exact dates and rates will be published soon.

In addition, make note that we normally announce our event’s **“Call For Speakers”** in December or January. We highly encourage all Buyers interested in attending, to consider speaking on a topic you feel comfortable and proficient enough to share with your fellow colleagues. Whether in a full hour-long session (at least 50 minutes of content), or a shorter timeframe from 15 to 30 minutes. Besides being open to anything related to pharmacy purchasing, a list of suggested topics as polled from the previous years’ Conference attendees, will be included when we release the new year’s announcement. Accepted speakers get comped registration, and travel expenses and/or a speaker fee are negotiable (based on length of presentation).

Whether you speak or just participate as a regular attendee, make preparations for next year’s NPPA Conference now; it’s an opportunity and experience no Pharmacy Buyer should let pass by!

