

Too many of Iowa's rural communities lack basic medical services, such as pharmacies. Several local drugstores have been unable to keep their doors open due to competition in larger communities, and the overhead costs of stocking pharmacy store shelves and having a pharmacist on staff. TelePharm, a young and innovative company, has created a way to locate an actual pharmacy store with other retail offerings in Iowa's rural communities, thereby improving access to medication needs and the health of Iowans in small towns.

TelePharm was founded in 2012 when Roby Miller experienced firsthand the pain of closing a family-owned pharmacy store in Eastern Iowa. It was through this experience that Roby developed a better way to operate rural pharmacies and offer other retail needs lacking in the community. The solution came through technology and software.

TelePharm is a software company enabling pharmacists to be located remotely from the actual pharmacy store, which cuts down on overhead costs and allows for pharmacy services to thrive on main street in rural Iowa. With pilot project locations in Zearing, Brooklyn, Victor, State Center, and West Liberty, TelePharm has created quite a buzz around the state that can be replicated for more storefronts in rural Iowa. Many more communities are embracing the TelePharm model and actively recruiting the company to locate in their towns.

When patients walk into a TelePharm-operated pharmacy, they are greeted by their local Certified Pharmacy Technician. The pharmacy technician prepares the prescription while being supervised in real-time by a remotely located pharmacist using the state-of-the-art TeleCheck Software from TelePharm. This software, which captures images from each step of the prescription filling process to reduce errors and ensure the highest level of security for patients, integrates seamlessly with pharmacy management software, improving the patient experience and satisfaction.

Patients are also able to receive medication counseling through TelePharm's secure video link and hardware services. Patients can speak with a licensed pharmacist at any time to get co-pay-free healthcare advice from a professional with just the push of a button. Pharmacists can ensure that patients understand their medications through a face-to-face conversations, building the relationships over time.

With 120 locations in 10 states, TelePharm is on the move and growing rapidly from its Iowa City headquarters across the street from the University of Iowa campus.

Discussions are ongoing with Iowa leaders and state legislative representatives for more pilot projects to take place in rural Iowa communities, with the anticipation of Iowa laws being passed to allow for this groundbreaking change and medical service to be provided for rural Iowa.

TelePharm's initial market research uncovered several Iowa towns that are located in "Pharmacy Deserts," described in rural America as reaching a critical shortage point for medication outlets. Residents in these small towns have no access to a local pharmacy or are in danger of losing their access due to their geographic location. TelePharm provides a solution to this phenomenon with vital products and services at lower costs that enhance the survival chances of rural Iowa pharmacy locations.

Pharmacies are a vital piece of the puzzle to keep rural Iowa communities thriving. Revitalizing main street across rural Iowa, some of the stores have seen more healthcare professionals hired in small towns. Pharmacists fit the need of other services.

In addition to the service TelePharm provides, the company and individuals that make it up create a culture of innovation within their field and geographic. As a start-up company, the team at TelePharm consists of creative and forward-thinking young professionals, with a clear goal: to provide consistent pharmacy access to rural residents. Many members of the TelePharm team graduated from the University of Iowa, and due to their close proximity to the university, share ideas and research. TelePharm is located in downtown Iowa City, a hub of creative thought in Eastern Iowa, known as the "Creative Corridor." This thriving community is made up of organizations and businesses that dream big in order to create and further showcase Iowa's talented individuals.

Iowa Area Development Group is pleased to assist TelePharm and communities that are engaged in bringing this service back to rural Iowa. TelePharm's innovative approach, remotely offering one pharmacist to cover several pharmacies and providing vital medicine to rural patients, is an outstanding and unique opportunity for rural Iowa communities.

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