

# Telepharmacy Serving a Small Rural Community

Adrian, Minnesota was founded in 1876, and for most of its 130 years, it had the services of a hometown pharmacist. That is, until the profit margins within the current pharmacy environment made it no longer feasible to run a fully staffed pharmacy in a small city like Adrian. That left city officials scrambling to provide this service to its citizens.

Bruce Heitkamp, Administrator/Clerk/Treasurer of the city of Adrian, didn't take the loss lightly.

"Adrian has a population of 1,234 people, with 35-40% seniors. I think it's fair to say that seniors use more pharmaceuticals and are less mobile than other segments of a population," said Bruce.

"The health clinic and nursing home located in Adrian have really felt the burden of not getting prescriptions filled in an expedient fashion. The closest pharmacy is 25 miles away. The clinic thought it might have to shut down without access to pharmaceuticals – **it seemed that all of the healthcare in Adrian centered on the logistics of the pharmacy and clinic.**

"I tried to find a new pharmacist to move to Adrian, but had no luck. I called the Minnesota Board of Pharmacy and a member of the board told me about a new pharmacy model – **ScriptPro's Telepharmacy.**"

Bruce was put in contact with Tim Gallagher, Vice President of Pharmacy Operations, Astrup Drug, Inc., which operates Sterling Drug, a regional chain in Minnesota.

"Bruce approached us about helping the town maintain pharmacy services after its pharmacy closed. They asked us to put a pharmacy in Adrian, but with the cost of hiring a pharmacist and the population of Adrian, it would not have been financially feasible," Tim said.

Tim was familiar with ScriptPro's technology, including Telepharmacy. Using ScriptPro's Telepharmacy, the pharmacist oversees and supports the filling and verifying of prescriptions via a video/audio/data link. Images captured at the remote location allow the support pharmacist to review, approve, and document all transactions. One-on-one patient counseling is also conducted through the video/audio link.

Sterling Drug has a location in near-by Worthington, MN, and the manager of the store indicated that the pharmacy staff had the capacity to support pharmacy services in Adrian. One pharmacy tech would work in Adrian full time.

The next step was to get approval from the Minnesota Board of Pharmacy. Several representatives from Astrup and from the town of Adrian, presented the plan to the board.

"The board members recognized that the ScriptPro technology was better than other Telepharmacy products that had already been approved," according to Tim. The board gave approval to move forward.

## **Astrup set the following goals for Telepharmacy:**

1. Maintain pharmaceutical services to the town of Adrian. Tim said that many rural pharmacies in Minnesota are closing and Adrian could be a model for other communities.
2. Address the pharmacist shortage, which in Minnesota has become critical.
3. Utilize existing staff efficiently.
4. Test the viability of providing services to rural communities that may not be able to find, or support, the cost of a full time pharmacist.

Tim Gallagher, Vice President of Pharmacy Operations, Astrup Drug, Inc., addressed the issues of rural areas losing pharmacy services.

"The mailman is not a good pharmacist. Mail order should not be the answer to these communities who need pharmaceutical services. You can expand pharmacy services for less than the cost of opening a new pharmacy and support remote pharmacies without adding staff or recruiting pharmacists. **Telepharmacy is a viable way to grow your business.**

"Before deciding, ask questions about the various Telepharmacy systems. No other system is as robust as ScriptPro's. Other systems do not offer the safety features of barcode scanning and visual verification. They do not keep a permanent digital record of the transactions."

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