

Counter Side Cartoons™: Humor as a Conduit for Positive Change in Pharmacists and Pharmacy

Van B Weber^{1*}, Lindsey R Davis² and Abigail E Jastrab³

¹University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy, United States

²The University of Akron, United States

³Lloyd L. Gregory School of Pharmacy, United States

*Corresponding Author: Van B Weber, University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy, United States.

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Abstract

Counter Side Cartoons™ is a web-based producer of cartoons created specifically with pharmacists in mind. Our mission is to use humor as a positive learning tool, a balm to combat the effects of stress inherent to the pharmacy profession. We have carefully compounded information and wisdom with visual humor to provide the best medicine for our colleagues and profession: humor with a positive message.

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Most people may not realize it, but there's a good chance their local pharmacist is suffering from workplace stress. Today's pharmacists deal with increasing workloads, never-ending changes to drug regulations, disgruntled customers and staff, potentially inept management, and insufficient staffing—all while bearing the perilous risk of injuring or even killing a patient with a single error. It's no wonder so many pharmacists struggle with burnout.

Now, of course, we realize that a cartoon isn't going to solve all these problems; however, laughter is a great place to start in reducing stress and occupational fatigue, which is why we launched Counter Side Cartoons™. We are a family of actively-practicing and retired pharmacists with over 80 combined years of pharmacy experience. The idea for our cartoons is, firstly, to make people laugh—to find humor and enjoyment in the pharmacy profession despite its frustrations— secondly, to drive conversation and highlight common issues in pharmacy, and thirdly to create a positive training tool for pharmacy business and management.

Humor and laughter are natural stress relievers. Recent medical research demonstrates that they also exercise our brains, resulting in an increased ability to focus, learn, and recall. Additionally, pain perception and loneliness are reduced by regular periods of humor and laughter. Humor is truly good medicine for people, a side effect free remedy.

A good cartoon can caricature a situation and capture what is and isn't acceptable practice in a pharmacy; teaching key professional expectations through humor. Cartoons have the added benefit of appealing to visual learners, and possess an emotional impact that makes it more likely that staff will remember its message than if they simply read a policy memo or dry report.

For example, if you come across a sign that says, "don't feed the llamas," you may think, "eh, why not?" But if you see an illustration of a crazy-eyed, shaggy-furred llama ferociously biting someone's hand, you'll be more apt to remember not to feed the llamas in the future. Through our cartoons, we hope to serve as a positive, lighthearted conduit for learning within the pharmacy community (without the llamas).

Our cartoons address many aspects of pharmacy operations including inadequate inventory, system changes, poor management standards, unacceptable personal attitudes, customer service, inspections, unrealistic expectations, robberies, corporate visits, metrics, and more. Likewise, common issues that pharmacists



Figure: A relatable example for pharmacists of what not to do. Image Twitter @cartoonside.

struggle with such as distractibility, overwork, or clock-watching can be satirized to inspire positive change. These humorous little “lessons” accumulate over time and can help bring an entire staff up to speed. And they’re not just for pharmacy staff and pharmacists. Managers, directors, supervisors, and corporate officers (yes, even CEO’s) could benefit as well.

Too often humor is rooted in negativity and cynicism. A laugh is garnered at the expense of someone else—not at Counter Side Cartoons™. We strive to create cartoons free of negative attitudes or condescending finger-pointing. Everyone, from pharmacists to technicians to managers, has something to learn. Everyone should be able to enjoy a laugh. Everyone should enjoy working in the pharmacy. We want the pharmacy staff to love this great profession.

Our cartoon images are free to download for personal use from our website: www.countersidecartoons.com. We also have a commercial option on our website for businesses. Find the cartoon that speaks to you and use it to spruce up a PowerPoint presentation, pharmacist and technician training materials, or Pharmacy School alumni letter—just please be sure to give us credit for the image. We also offer pharmacy merchandise to supply the perfect gift for your deserving fellow pharmacy nerds. This service is intended to help us continue to put smiles on the face of pharmacy, the Pharmacist.

We regularly add to our cartoon inventory and are open to new ideas. If our followers have an appropriate idea for a cartoon, we’d love to hear it! We can be contacted by email at countersidecartoons@gmail.com or Tweet us @cartoonside. If we think it’s a great idea, we’ll feature it on our website.

In closing, to my fellow pharmacists: keep up the great work. Stay vigilant, be professional, and practice self-care (that includes a positive attitude). Pharmacy is certainly an intensive career, but do yourself, your pharmacy staff, and patients a favor by creating

a welcoming, positive environment in which everyone can thrive. Customers will notice the change and enjoy the healthy atmosphere. Remember, pharmacy humor is just one remedy you can use to initiate positive change—there are others. But this remedy is free, enjoyable, and healthy, so don’t forget your daily dose of humor! You can change the face of Pharmacy today! Pharmacy is truly a great profession and you, dear colleagues, are the face of Pharmacy.

Acknowledgements

Van Weber and his wife, Kristen, both graduated from the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy and reside in Gettysburg, Pa. Lindsey R. Davis B.A, M.S Ed graduated from The University of Akron and resides in Richmond Heights, OH with her husband Curt. Abby Jastrab, PharmD, BCPS, graduated from Lloyd L. Gregory School of Pharmacy in 2010 and resides in Pittsburgh, Pa with her husband, T.J., and their twin boys.

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