

Changing roles, duties

First Empowerment session centred on pharmacy.

SHANIE LEVIN

Pharmacist Ted Mah headlined the first session of this year's Empowerment Series, which is presented by Jewish Seniors Alliance with the help of the Phyllis and Irving Snider Foundation.

The Oct. 29 talk on Zoom was called Make Friends With Your Pharmacist. Mah spoke about the roles and responsibilities of pharmacists, which now include supporting people's health and well-being, in addition to filling prescriptions and other duties.

Mah graduated from the University of British Columbia in 1995 and began his career at a Safeway Pharmacy in Victoria. After five years, he was promoted to management and, for seven years, operated the Safeway Pharmacy at City Square in Vancouver. Currently, he is the manager of the Safeway location on Arbutus in Vancouver.

The Zoom started with a few words about Jewish Seniors Alliance by Gyda Chud, a former co-president of JSA and also chair of the program committee. Chud spoke about JSA's theme of "Seniors Stronger Together" and its three guiding principles of "Outreach, Education and Advocacy" and how they can empower us.

Mah said he enjoyed his training at UBC. In his fourth year, when he did an internship at a hospital, he became very aware of the positive impact that pharmacy can have on patients when the rules and procedures are properly followed.

According to Mah, Safeway Pharmacies have a central distribution venue, where the preparation of medications is handled by robots to reduce the possibility of human error in the counting of pills. In all the stores' pharmacies, audits are done regularly to ensure proper care and count of medications, including narcotics. Expired medications are disposed of.

Most pharmacies can make blister packages of weekly medications available upon request. Plastic see-through pouches are also available, labelled with the name of the medication, dose and time of day that it should be taken. For people with visual impairments, there is a chip and a machine that will read out the contents of the bottle.

There have recently been many changes in what pharmacists are permitted to do to assist patients and save time for physicians. Pharmacists can now administer more vaccines than they were able to in the past; for example, they can now give polio shots. They can also prescribe medication for many minor ailments without a doctor's prescription: these include antihistamines for seasonal allergies, nasal steroids, antibiotic eye drops, contraceptives, and medications that help with skin conditions including eczema, dermatitis, diaper rash and

bacterial infections. As well, pharmacists can prescribe topical creams for such problems as toenails, dandruff, oral cancer and cold sores, yeast and urinary tract infections, shingles, and a host of other ailments.

The Empowerment session Q&A included a question about renewing ongoing prescriptions without consulting a doctor. Mah said this would depend on something called "adaptation," which includes the renewal itself, as well as changing the dose, formulation or other aspects of a prescription. A pharmacist can generally do these things, however, a doctor can order that a prescription not be adapted.

Another question concerned the new mRNA vaccine for COVID, which, at this point, should be given annually, like the flu vaccine. There were also several questions about supplements, such as vitamins or calcium.

Mah said pharmacists can do medication reviews by appointment. This could include a discussion of supplements, such as how they interact with various medications. Information about people's prescriptions is entered into PharmaNet, the province-wide data network.

Mah said drugs that a person is no longer using should be returned to a pharmacy in a Ziploc bag for disposal. For syringes, one should pick up a special container from the pharmacy.

Another question concerned psychotropic drugs, and also the tolerance of various drugs for different age groups, especially seniors. Mah said this is a question for a physician but added that, when a new drug is prescribed, it is usually only enough for 30 days at most, in case there is a negative reaction.

Other questions concerned taking a flu shot and COVID shot together, which is fine to do, and how long one should wait after having a COVID shot to have a booster – apparently three months is now OK.

Pharmacists must engage in regular professional development to maintain their licences, said Mah, who added that there is a current shortage of pharmacists in British Columbia because their new roles and responsibilities have increased the demand for their services.

Tamara Frankel, a member of the program committee and a board member of JSA, thanked Mah for his participation and for all his helpful information. The event was co-sponsored by the Perez Centre for Secular Jewish Culture. ■

Shanie Levin is a Jewish Seniors Alliance Life Governor. She is also on the editorial committee of Senior Line magazine.

Looking for everyday heroes

CYNTHIA RAMSAY

The deadline to nominate someone for the 2025 Courage to Come Back Awards is Jan. 17. The awards, presented by Wheaton Precious Metals, pay tribute to everyday heroes who have overcome immense challenges and now give back to their community. They also raise funds so that Coast Mental Health can continue to provide community-based services for people living with mental illness in British Columbia.

"I really believe that having the opportunity to tell my story was something I had no idea I really needed," said Rachel Goldman, who received a Courage to Come Back Award in the medical category last year. "It was the first time in my life that I had celebrated the part of myself that I always viewed as my greatest weakness. The ability to overcome challenges is always something to be celebrated. Courage is a superpower. I have no doubt that others would benefit from putting themselves or others forward, too. It is a gift that others should absolutely experience."

Goldman was born with CVID, common variable immune deficiency, which causes low levels of the proteins that help fight infections. Initially, she

was uncomfortable about being nominated for the honour, as her illness was something she had only ever faced privately.

"That others would view this as both resilient and brave was not something I had really considered – that was just the way I chose to approach life," she said. "The nomination showed me that resilience and bravery are something to be celebrated and that having the opportunity to shine a light on rare and invisible illnesses like mine is a privilege."

Winning a Courage to Come Back Award has impacted Goldman's life in a few ways.

"It opened the door to thoughtful conversation regarding my health and my life and allowed me the ability to really explain to those around me what it is like to live in my shoes," she said. "It was not easy, but it began a healing journey to better understand my health needs. My hope is still to bring aware-



Rachel Goldman received a Courage to Come Back Award in 2023.

ness to those that are suffering from diseases like mine and that research worldwide will continue towards helping those like me to live a more fulfilling and healthy life."

The 2025 Courage to Come Back Awards are granted in four categories: addiction, medical, mental health and youth (ages 19-25). Recipients will be recognized in a celebration at the Vancouver Convention Centre on May 7.

"As chair of the Courage to Come Back Awards, reading through the hundreds of nominations we receive every year is a moment I look forward to with great anticipation. All of them are true journeys of bravery, resilience and strength in the face of adversity. I am grateful to those that have the courage to share their stories with us," said Lorne Segal, who is also president of Kingswood Properties Ltd.

To nominate someone and/or find out more about the process, visit couragetocomeback.ca/nominations. ■

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