



The Pharmacist Activist

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“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth...” Ecclesiastes 12:3a

Editorial

WE REMEMBER!

In addition to the personal loss and grief following the deaths of family members and friends, there are tragedies resulting in the deaths of individuals whom we do not personally know that create continuing painful memories because of the circumstances under which they occurred and/or knowing family members or friends of the victims. The following are among the tragedies/deaths that have become lasting memories for me, and a determination to remember and pay tribute to the victims and those who loved them.

The victims of the terrorist attacks

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 resulted in the deaths of thousands of individuals on that date, and thousands more later from the injuries and harm inflicted by the attacks. The attacks were so horrific that, twenty-five years later, we remember where we were and what we were doing when we became aware of the attacks and our attention was riveted on the news coverage. We will not forget the victims and the heroism of those on Flight 93, the first responders, and others, many of whom also died during their efforts to help and protect others. It is important that we inform those who were not yet born or at an age of awareness at the time of these events of the consequences of hatred and murder.

I did not personally know any of the individuals who died in the attacks of 9/11. However, several years later I learned that Jim Sands, one of the victims in the World Trade Center, was the hus-

band of one of my former students, Jennifer Trebino Sands, at the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy. My learning of this relationship resulted from a news commentary about a book Jennifer had written, *A Tempered Faith: Rediscovering Hope in the Ashes of Loss*. I contacted Jennifer and, since that time, she, my wife Sue and I have become close friends and meet several times each year.

Jennifer did not consider herself to be a “religious” person in 2001. However, stunned with grief and pain from the loss of her husband, her first reaction was to be angry at God because she had briefly prayed for safe travel for Jim each day he traveled from their New Jersey home to New York City. Her grief continued but, with the passing of time, the support of family and friends, and a remarkable series of events, Jennifer developed a strong faith in God and is now an acclaimed Christian author and speaker. She has written two more books: *A Teachable Faith: Learning from God in Everyday Life* and *A Treasured Faith: Refining a Heart for the Riches of Christ*.

Jennifer’s website is www.jennifersands.com, and her books are published by The Olive Press in Savannah, Georgia. Her courage and faith are inspirational and I encourage you to learn more about her experience and ministry.

Charlie Kirk

Charlie Kirk was murdered on September 10, 2025. The founder

Contents

Remembering CVS Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians Who Committed Suicide.....Page 2

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of Turning Point USA, Charlie had a gift for working and communicating with college and high school students. However, his passion for his faith and his patriotism had a profound impact on individuals of all ages. I heard him speak several years ago at a function attended by several thousand individuals. His message included, in part, a focus on the importance of the factors that influence career decisions, educational choices (e.g., college degree programs, apprenticeships for trades) and their cost, many of which are discussed in his book, *College Scam*. His presentation was inspiring and thought-provoking, and among the best I have heard.

Unlike many, Charlie Kirk was willing to listen to those with differing opinions, and engage in respectful and informative debate. He was 31 when he was murdered. His wife, Erika, and colleagues at Turning Point are committed to continue and expand his work and his message.

Ashleigh Anderson

Pharmacist Ashleigh Anderson worked for CVS in Indiana for many years. Described by those who knew her best as “the smartest person in any room,” she was a very capable and conscientious professional. Soon after she arrived at her CVS store on September 10, 2021, she began experiencing chest pain and other symptoms that she recognized could be as serious as a heart attack or much less serious manifestations of heartburn. She knew the CVS policies that, unless there was an emergency, CVS management could view her leaving the store before a replacement pharmacist

arrived as abandonment of her position with resultant disciplinary action. She called her supervisor who informed her that she should seek medical attention, even though the pharmacy would have to be closed until a replacement arrived. Because she was so conscientious, as well as aware of CVS policies, expectations, and potential for disciplinary action, Ashleigh decided to wait for the replacement pharmacist who was expected to arrive within two hours. Ashleigh Anderson collapsed and died in the store. She was 41.

Ashleigh’s father, Larry Anderson, knew of the stress, metrics, and greater risk of errors as a result of Ashleigh’s experiences and concerns at CVS. He had a billboard placed in Ashleigh’s memory on an interstate highway in Indiana, and he had numerous discussions with CVS spokespersons. His frustrations with CVS claiming it had no responsibility prompted him to contact the Indiana Board of Pharmacy, and he has also met with state officials including the Governor of Indiana. He was encouraged by these discussions but continues to be frustrated by the lack of any meaningful response from CVS or any indication that the stressful workplace environment had changed. He considered suing CVS only to learn that the statute of limitations for a wrongful death lawsuit had expired. Based on his experiences, Larry has become all the more determined to be a strong advocate to protect both patients and pharmacists from harm, and to establish better and safer working conditions in CVS and other chain stores.

Daniel A. Hussar

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Remembering CVS Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians Who Committed Suicide

- **Pharmacy technician Gavin Caban committed suicide on February 14, 2025. He was 24.**
- **Pharmacist Kevin Uhl committed suicide on April 18, 2025. He was 36.**
- **Pharmacist Robert Reybock committed suicide on June 12, 2025. He was 50.**
- **Pharmacist Mason Porta committed suicide on June 15, 2025. He was 28.**
- **Pharmacy technician Jayden Urban committed suicide on June 23, 2025. He was 21.**

All five individuals worked at CVS stores within 50 miles of each other in eastern Pennsylvania. These are the CVS pharmacy employees in this area who committed suicide whom I know about. There may be more. The five suicides occurred in a period

of approximately 4 months. Robert Reybock and Mason Porta worked in stores approximately five miles apart in the Lancaster, PA area in which I live, and committed suicide within three days of each other. I have spoken with family members and/or close

friends of the three pharmacists. Their grief and anger continue.

The CVS “response” was to threaten the employees of the stores to not discuss the suicides or there could be legal problems. It alleged that there were factors, other than their CVS employment, that resulted in the suicides. It insisted that CVS stores were adequately staffed during a period in which they were overwhelmed with hundreds of thousands of prescriptions it obtained from Rite Aid stores that were closed in bankruptcy proceedings. It attempted to suppress media coverage of the suicides to the point of misrepresenting and attempting to discredit the individuals (myself included) who voiced concerns about the suicides and the working conditions at CVS stores.

Susan Shapiro, investigative reporter and news anchor at NBC-WGAL in Lancaster, was not intimidated when CVS was initially able to delay the airing of her report. She persevered with her report about the tragedies of the suicides of the two Lancaster pharmacists, and the stressful working conditions that increased the risk of harmful medication errors for patients and their communities. Her report was circulated nationally and she was selected as the recipient of an award for her investigative reporting.

Melissa Koehler, President of the Lancaster County Pharmacists Association, one of the few active county associations in the state, visited the two CVS stores in which Robert Reybock and Mason Porta worked to voice sympathy to the store employees and provide them with flower arrangements and assorted snacks.

What if these events were serious medication errors instead of suicides?

When a serious medication error occurs, safety experts and others investigate to determine the “root cause(s)” of the error, for the purposes of identifying and increasing awareness of the factors that were causative, and reducing the risk of these errors in the future. The Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) has done an exemplary job in this regard.

Why is there not an investigation and determination of the root causes of the suicides of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, particularly when five employees of the same company living about 50 miles from each other commit suicide in a period of approximately four months? There should be and must be investigations and identification of the root causes of these tragic events.

Employment at CVS is a root cause for the suicides of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. This statement is NOT based on CVS being the largest employer of pharmacists and technicians, but rather on its staffing policies and metrics that result in mental

health crises for many of its pharmacy employees. Available information strongly indicate that CVS’s demanding policies and metrics are more likely than those of other employers of pharmacists to cause a stressful workplace, more errors, and a higher risk of mental crises and self-harm of pharmacy employees. The investigations and actions must begin at the CVS executive offices with the individuals who establish the policies with which pharmacists are required to comply!

For now, the best advice I can provide for new pharmacy graduates is: “To protect your own mental and physical health, DON’T WORK FOR CVS!”

Boards of pharmacy

In July of last year, I submitted a complaint to the Pennsylvania State Board of Pharmacy, voicing my concerns about the suicides of Robert Reybock and Mason Porta, and the working conditions at their and other CVS stores that increased the risk of errors for their customers and the safety of those in their communities. I was interviewed by an inspector who was very thorough, and I was optimistic that a comprehensive investigation would be conducted and appropriate actions taken. However, more than a year later, to my knowledge, no actions have resulted.

I do not fault the pharmacist members of the Board. The autonomy and actions of the Board are limited by state administration officials and the attorneys they assign to the Board. Pharmacists who serve on the Board are appointed by the Governor and, if they attempt to override the decisions of the attorneys, the appointments of the pharmacists could be revoked. But how can the suicides of two pharmacists within three days, working for the same company in the same community, and the safety of the customers in these stores, just be ignored? I intend to file another complaint with the expanded concerns of the five known suicides of CVS pharmacy employees in Pennsylvania in an approximately 4-month period of time, and the safety of prescription customers who use CVS stores.

Because of numerous variables, I have not been an advocate for regulations that would impose maximum numbers of prescriptions and immunizations a pharmacist may dispense or administer during a certain period of time. However, working conditions that are causative factors in suicides, as well as the unknown, unreported, and uncounted medication errors made in CVS stores must be investigated and corrective actions taken. I urge that the Pennsylvania State Board of Pharmacy take the following actions:

- Require CVS to provide the numbers of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians employed in its Pennsylvania stores

on January 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026, as well as the weekly averages of hours worked by each of these groups on these dates.

- Require CVS to provide the weekly averages of the number of prescriptions dispensed and the number of immunizations administered in its Pennsylvania stores on January 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026
- Require CVS to provide the number and types of medication errors for which it requires internal reporting that occurred in its Pennsylvania stores during the period of January 1, 2025 through September 30, 2026.
- Require CVS to provide the number of lawsuits filed against it for alleged errors and other reasons involving its Pennsylvania stores during the period of January 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026, and the disposition of the lawsuits (e.g., settlements and amounts).
- Require CVS to provide the names of the pharmacists and pharmacy technicians who were employed or recently employed in its Pennsylvania stores who committed suicide during the period of January 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

The information required is consistent with the Board of Pharmacy's responsibility to protect the health and safety of Pennsylvania residents with respect to the operations and practice of pharmacies. I anticipate that the information acquired will justify a conclusion that CVS stores are understaffed to the extent that the safety of its prescription customers and pharmacy employees is at serious risk. If that is the conclusion, I recommend that the Board require CVS to DOUBLE the number of pharmacist and pharmacy technician hours in its Pennsylvania stores no later than April 1, 2027.

Pharmacy organizations

The concerns I have identified are not limited to local and state boundaries, but are national in importance and scope. The Ameri-

can Pharmacists Association (APhA), the American Society of Health-system Pharmacists (ASHP), the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP), and other national pharmacy organizations have devoted extensive resources to increasing the awareness of the mental health issues and suicides for which pharmacy professionals are at risk. There have been numerous initiatives to address issues such as burnout, resilience, and wellbeing.

September is Suicide Prevention Month that is "dedicated to raising awareness, reducing stigma, and fostering conversations that can save lives." In 2023, the APhA and ASHP, the two largest pharmacy organizations, identified September 20 as Pharmacy Workforce Suicide Awareness Day, on which the pharmacy community "is urged to pause, remember those lost to suicide, and help make support more visible for peers." The organizations were influential in the recent introduction of a House of Representatives resolution recognizing September 20 as Pharmacy Workforce Suicide Awareness Day.

The resolutions, wellbeing programs, toolkits, and other suicide-awareness initiatives are all important and to be commended. However, their effectiveness can not or have not been evaluated, and they have not included what should be the most important actions to reduce the suicides of pharmacists and technicians. The identity and employment status of the pharmacy suicide victims are known, but investigations and root cause analyses have not been conducted and I am not aware of any plans to do so. APhA and ASHP leaders should undertake these investigations and analyses and, for the reasons noted earlier, these actions should begin with discussions with the executives of CVS. The failure of CVS executives to participate in such discussions or the failure to provide pertinent information should be considered to be a self-indictment of the role of their policies in the suicides of their own pharmacists and technicians. If the leaders of APhA and ASHP do not pursue the investigations, root cause analyses, and discussions with CVS, they should inform their memberships why they are not willing to do so.

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