

Rick Samimi

NSW Branch President, Pharmacy Guild of Australia.

Pharmacy Connect is a national conference and trade show hosted by the Pharmacy Guild of Australia. It will be held on September 1-3 at the Hilton Sydney. The conference will feature workshops beforehand, a two-day education program and a 60-stand trade exhibition.



Congratulations on your election as NSW Branch President. Can you tell us a little about your professional background? What brought you to this position at the Guild?

RS: Thank you. I am honoured to have been unanimously elected as the NSW Guild Branch President by my colleagues. I look forward to assisting the Guild in its crucial advocacy role to the Government on behalf of our members and the 65,000 or so valued employees in the community-pharmacy network across Australia.

I graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. I worked as a community pharmacist in a range of pharmacies until 1998. During this period, I also completed a Master of Commerce at UNSW, as well as a Diploma in Natural Medicines.

As an employee pharmacist, I had a keen interest in understanding the complex role of the Guild and therefore used to follow the Guild closely to understand its functional role in stability and progress of the profession, as well as the network of community pharmacies across Australia.

As a result, as soon as I bought my first pharmacy in 1998, I became a Guild member in NSW.

By early 2002, I was co-managing four pharmacies with my partners and started my active participation in the Guild's grassroots activities in NSW. I was also appointed a board member of the Australian College of Pharmacy during this period (a role I held for almost six years).

I was elected to the NSW branch of the Guild in 2011 and became state vice president in early 2014. I have been a National Councillor since 2016 and have now been elected Branch President. This was following the retirement of three long-serving members of the NSW branch last December to facilitate succession planning at the branch.

You have been a pharmacy owner for many years. Tell us what you think makes a successful pharmacy owner.



"It is clear that if we continue with 'business as usual', our role in the primary-healthcare sector will be greatly diminished in the next few years, as we will be left behind."

RS: The impact of various political and fiscal decisions by successive federal governments in recent years, and the aggressive incursion of discounting in the sector, have redefined and vastly expanded the required commercial acumen and skillset for most Guild members to remain successful commercially.

But the continuing impact of those factors doesn't change the core elements needed to run a successful community pharmacy:

- Focusing on the needs and wants of your customers and patients.
- Selecting and training good staff to provide optimal service and advice on a consistent basis.
- Keeping an eye on, and managing, the day-to-day issues of the business.
- Being prepared to embrace change, and introduce change as customers' expectations change.
- Engaging expert back-office legal and financial advisers to assist with the financial wellbeing of the business.

Pharmacy is going through a difficult period with remuneration cuts. What advice would you give members to survive and thrive?

RS: While our core competency will always remain dispensing and advising on medications, we must continue to focus on rapid transformation towards other remunerated services, such as screening and detection tests, compliance-monitoring services, eHealth and expanded immunisation.

It is clear that if we continue with 'business as usual', our role in the primary healthcare sector will be greatly diminished in the next few years, as we will be left behind – not only by our competitors in the sector, but also by our customers and patients.

Community pharmacies of the future will have to be 'health hubs' offering a range of health and clinical services, as well as products.

The NSW Branch of the Guild is the biggest. What are some of the core competencies of the branch as an organisation?

RS: We are transforming our own member offer at the branch at the same time as advocating business-model transformation to our members in their pharmacies.

For example, we have developed a new division called 'business support', which offers a range of members-only services and tools to assist in business-model improvement and transformation. Members can access a suite of programs and business tools, including QCPP support, professional-services viability test, Scriptmap and, of course, the fully supported Health Advice Plus.

We're also reviewing and improving our service model to members in 'learning and development', as well as member support services. This applies in particular to our workplace relations (WR) advice and offer to members. Industrial-relations advice is a core competency of our branch. However, WR advice under Fair Work is much more than just that. We aim to offer members training as well as advice and support services.

What are the key initiatives you will be pursuing under your leadership?

RS:

- Transformation of our business model from its current form (which is very good) to an expanded services model.
- Greater gender diversity at NSW Guild by encouraging and supporting more engagement and involvement from our female members.
- Better member engagement, including more face-to-face town hall-style meetings to brief members and listen to their concerns and needs.
- Advocacy to state government regarding various state-based issues.
- Continuing political advocacy at both NSW and federal levels. ^{RP}