



**Women's International Pharmacy**  
Custom Compounded Prescriptions for Men and Women

## WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL PHARMACY GAINS INSIGHT, INFORMATION



### Women's International Pharmacy

- › Based in Madison, Wis.
- › 200 employees
- › WIP provides custom compounded hormone medications to patients nationwide.
- › Self-funded health insurance since 2010
- › Workforce split between two locations in Wisconsin and in Arizona
- › Relied on self-funding to help overcome employees' concerns that the level of health benefits varied based on where they worked.

› *Employees use the walking track that was created within the WIP warehouse by painting red "feet" along a designated path.*

Information and insight are a powerful combination. Women's International Pharmacy (WIP) gained both by joining The Alliance®.

The Madison, Wis.-based company has about 200 employees, split about evenly between locations in Wisconsin and Arizona.

### The Information Gap

Like other employers offering benefits through a health maintenance organization (HMO) as part of a fully insured plan, WIP was frustrated by its inability to learn more about health benefit costs. As a result, WIP was blocked from exploring opportunities to control those costs.

"Under conventional insurance, there was no transparency," Executive Vice-President Connie Kindschi Hegerfeld said. Health care "transparency" exists when purchasers and patients can access accurate information about prices, quality and outcomes.

"We couldn't get information about what our employees were doing or what kind of programs would be helpful from our insurance company," Hegerfeld recalls. "Our employees and their families used doctors within the HMO and then at the end of the year, we would get a double-digit price increase."

Lacking information, WIP had difficulty understanding what drove its health care costs, negotiating cost-effective contract renewals and educating employees.

### Opting for Self-Funding

WIP learned about The Alliance's approach to managing employee health and health benefits from a casual conversation at a benefits conference.

The Alliance moves health care forward by controlling costs, improving quality and engaging individuals in their health. The Alliance is an employer-owned, not-for-profit cooperative with more than 200 members that provide coverage to more than 90,000 individuals in Wisconsin, Illinois and Iowa.

WIP learned how self-funded plans aid employers in controlling costs and how employers protect their companies from the potential cost of high claims through re-insurance.

The Alliance helped WIP transition to self-funded health benefits on Jan. 1, 2010 with educational sessions and materials. The Alliance's broad network of more than 10,365 providers and specialists allowed almost all WIP employees to continue to use their preferred physicians and facilities.

### A Cohesive Culture

Moving to self-funding helped WIP create a sense that "we're all in this together" when it comes to health benefits, Hegerfeld said.

Previously, Hegerfeld said Arizona employees sometimes felt Wisconsin workers were offered better health benefits.



Working with The Alliance in Wisconsin and a similar self-funded network in Arizona gives all employees similar health coverage with access to a broad range of health care providers and facilities in both locations.

“Employees understand that the dollars to pay for WIP’s share of health benefits comes directly out of WIP’s pocketbook,” said a human resources manager. “That makes a big difference in how employees view the health plan and health costs.”

## Reducing Costs

Hegerfeld said WIP saved a “significant” amount in its first two years with The Alliance when self-funded plan costs were compared to premiums for a fully-insured program. The company gained significant discounts through the network, while employees gained access to many providers and facilities previously excluded from their plan.

In addition, WIP gained access to reports about health care usage patterns. WIP used that information to redesign its employee benefits guide and improve its wellness program.

WIP also educated employees about how their decisions impact health care costs. The Alliance helped by leading free, hour-long sessions on “Becoming a Better Health Care Consumer” for WIP employees at its Madison workplace, with a webinar to share the information with workers in Arizona.

## Sharing Information

Hegerfeld said WIP often looks to The Alliance and its members for information and ideas. WIP participated in The Alliance’s pilot project to explore value-based benefit design.

“The Alliance gives us quality service to meet our needs, but they also help us conserve costs through the programs they offer,” Hegerfeld said. “They offer options to help us understand some of the solutions that are available to us that we might not have thought about.”

Alliance members often volunteer to share what they’ve learned in one-to-one conversations, seminars or case studies. Hegerfeld often attends Alliance Learning Circle events led by national experts on wellness, benefits and health care reform.

Speakers include Shannon Brownlee, award-winning author of “Overtreated: Why Too Much Medicine is Making Us Sicker and Poorer,” and Sean Foy, author of “Fitness That Works: Simple Moves to Make Exercise Happen from 9 to 5,” who has appeared on ABC, NBC and CBN to share ideas for overcoming the harmful effects of sitting for hours at a time.

Information gathered from these experts helps shape WIP’s programs for employees. Learning more about the risks of a sedentary lifestyle prompted WIP to create walking programs and put a walking track in its warehouse, for example.

## Looking Forward

A human resources manager said WIP trusts The Alliance to provide reliable information because it is a not-for-profit cooperative owned by its members.

“Because of its cooperative nature, The Alliance truly advocates for employers trying to manage their health benefits,” the manager said. “And we’re advocates of The Alliance.”



**Member Services Manager Jesse Oberloh visited the WIP worksite to present multiple educational sessions aimed at helping employees make better health care decisions.**



**Employees at the lunch and learn gained information about how to become a better health care consumer.**

## WIP's Advice for Employers

1. Research your claims.
2. Learn about self-funded options.
3. Talk with The Alliance experts.
4. Pull in other resources, including your insurance representative.
5. Examine data to learn how choices impact costs.
6. Educate employees about benefits and health issues.
7. Use wellness programs to foster better health habits.

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The Alliance moves health care forward by controlling costs, improving quality, and engaging individuals in their health. An employer-owned, not-for-profit cooperative, our 200 members provide coverage to more than 90,000 individuals in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa.

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