

Dan Couturier— Avoiding Hazards by Safely Going the Extra Mile for Patients!

By Jeannie Counce

Sometimes avoiding a problem means finding an innovative way to press through it. That's exactly what Dan Couturier, a delivery driver for New England Life Care (NELC), recently did when he encountered an iced-over stretch of road that lay between him and a patient's house on his route in rural Maine. Knowing how important it is for patients to receive timely deliveries of medication and supplies, he took it upon himself to hike it in.

Couturier and his fellow drivers faced exceptionally harsh winter weather this season with a “polar vortex,” winter storms spanning seven consecutive weekends, and a great deal of icing on the roads. One Monday in early January, while driving his route, Couturier ran into a roadblock—literally.

“The patient's house is about a quarter-mile off the main road on a private drive,” recalls Couturier. “Over the weekend, we had freezing rain and the road looked like a skating rink.”



Dan Couturier, a delivery driver for New England Life Care in Portland, Maine, braves unusually treacherous winter weather to get medications and supplies to patients.

It was easy to see that attempting to drive it could lead to treacherous trouble. “The road dips down a little, runs flat, and then goes up a slight rise,” he explains. “I knew if I tried it in the delivery truck, I'd be likely to get stuck in the low spot and not have enough traction to get up the other side.”

“On the other hand,” he adds, “I also knew that the patient needed

his medication.” Couturier called to see if a family member could meet him partway, and learned that the patient was home alone and in no condition to attempt the walk, especially on such a dangerous surface.

“We always carry crampons in the truck, so I put them on and started walking,” says Couturier. “Luckily, the delivery was just one box and wasn't too heavy,” he

Editor's Note: Alternate-site infusion providers are on a continuous journey towards achieving excellence. A path of quality care, paved with many examples of leadership and commitment—some highly visible, some not as readily apparent (but, nonetheless, deeply rooted and vitally important). Beyond the unmistakable center-stage roles played by home infusion pharmacists and nurses within our field, perhaps the most unexpected treasures for us all to discover and explore can be found in the stories of the skilled employees that work behind-the-scenes to make a home infusion company successful—the devoted “faces behind-the-scenes.”

Could your business thrive without the knowledge, skills and experience demonstrated by the personnel in the warehouse, the technicians, intake staff, dietitians, drivers and other critical individuals who display the passion and caring for the patient through the work they do every day? In Faces Behind-the-Scenes, INFUSION recognizes and examines these indispensable faces behind-the-scenes!



The road leading to an infusion patient's home is covered with a sheet of ice and completely impassable following a series of winter storms.

adds. "For a big, heavy delivery of nutrition formula or fluids, I'd have to make a couple trips."

Couturier reports that the crampons, which are like cleats that stretch over a shoe, were a terrific help. "They dug into the ice and kept me from sliding all over the place."

Not Missing a Dose

The patient Couturier eventually reached was on a six-week course of IV ampicillin. "A missed dose would have been cause for con-

cern," explains David Bresnahan, R.Ph., Pharmacist, at NELC's Portland branch. "This drug has a limited stability and needs to be sent to the patient three times a week." There's no wiggle room in the timing, he adds. "The medication was compounded that morning for use that evening."

If the delivery didn't make it, the patient's best option would be to get to another place to get treatment, explains Bresnahan. But, given the icy road and his underlying condition,

transportation would be a major challenge. "He might have had to call 911," he says. "At the very least, we would have had to call the physician and report a missed dose, and see what he would recommend."

"I wasn't surprised when I heard what Dan did," continues Bresnahan, who notes that the pharmacists work with the delivery drivers so they know what's coming and have a sense of how critical their role is.

"Dan's actions show the attitude and understanding that we are entrusted with a great responsibility. That motivates them to go above and beyond," he adds. "I always feel better when our guys make the deliveries versus a common carrier. Even with the weather-related challenges, I can't see our people turning around. They understand that this therapy keeps patients out of the hospital."

Balancing Risk and Reward

It's not uncommon for delivery drivers in this part of the country to encounter winter weather-related challenges, according to Seth Pierce, Operations Coordinator. "I think almost every delivery driver we've had has been stuck at least



Crampons stretch over boots or shoes and function like cleats, digging into the ice to stabilize footing in winter weather

once in his/her career here at NELC,” he recalls. The situation is often compounded by homebound patients who aren’t able to get out and clear their sidewalks and driveways of snow and ice.”

NELC supplies each truck with tools, such as jumper cables, crampons, a GPS unit, a company-issued cell phone, and an emergency bag packed with other useful items, such as chains and a blanket, to manage most situations. “We are here to back them up, but we rely on our drivers to use good judgment when delivering,” says Pierce, who heard about Couturier’s “extra-mile” delivery after he returned to the pharmacy with photos of the ice swath on his phone.

When bad weather challenges deliveries, there’s a balance to be struck. If he chose to press on in the delivery truck, Couturier risked damaging the vehicle, injuring himself, jeopardizing the remainder of the day’s deliveries—or any combination thereof. If he chose to turn-around without making the deliv-

ery, the patient’s health could be at risk. “I attribute Dan’s balance to his great judgment and his ability to make safe, responsible decisions on the road,” says Pierce.

“We have a great staff that has great judgment and is able to act on their own in the field,” he continues, adding that drivers encounter many different situations from road conditions to noticing issues in a patient’s home. “Sometimes a driver will see that something in the home is unsafe—the patient doesn’t have heat or food in the fridge—and they communicate it back to the office immediately.”

Typical Day

To Couturier, who has worked at NELC for two years and hasn’t missed a delivery yet, trekking in on foot is just part of a typical day. “I used to work at L.L. Bean and they taught us to treat every customer the way you’d want to be treated,” he explains. “I know I would appreciate someone getting my medications to me.”

“Patients are at the forefront of the company philosophy,” he adds. “We try to make sure they are serviced the best we can and cover their needs. And, we have a built-in, ongoing process where we always try to do things better.”

Pierce reports that the patient recently completed his therapy. “I was on the phone with him arranging an equipment pick-up and he said our service and delivery staff was outstanding,” he recalls. “He saw many of our drivers, but he mentioned Dan by name—saying he was very professional, thoughtful, and thorough when making deliveries.”

“I’m proud of the people we work with,” adds Pharmacist Bresnahan. “It’s great to know that they are here for the patients.”

“Drivers are the face of NELC,” concludes Pierce, “they just continue the great service we provide from the beginning to the end.” ■

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Share your stories and help us celebrate—and learn from—the unsung heroes of the alternate-site infusion community.

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