

## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



# Carmen Riley

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, CH2

Some in the industry may have hoped CH2 would go away, Carmen Riley tells *Retail Pharmacy*, but she assures that the wholesaler whose daily operation she is responsible for is cemented in the sector and continues to offer an alternative to the market.

**Carmen, it's been a while since the last time we talked to you, so please remind our readers of who you are by telling us a little about yourself and your experience in the pharmaceutical sector.**

Originally from Queensland, I'm a CPA and have been lucky enough throughout my career to move into operational roles that have led me to supply chains. I was previously the CEO of a business that was eventually sold to Clifford Hallam Healthcare (CH2), where I've been for the past 10 years.

As COO, I'm responsible for all customer-facing functions, including the sales streams, marketing and customer service, as well as procurement, data management and business intelligence. I was also appointed as a director to CH2 in 2020, and also joined the LUCRF Super board in 2019.

CH2 services public and private hospitals, aged care, primary care, animal health and community pharmacies. We were only listed as a CSO distributor in 2017, and it's been a very steep learning curve since then that has resulted in tremendous growth for our business. CH2 has been around for more than 80 years. However, since we were acquired by David Collins and Peter Lacaze in late 2015, we've had an unbelievable growth journey, but that's what the right owners and vision can do.

**CH2, like all wholesalers, has been challenged by Covid-19. Can you tell us how the business has met this challenge?**

Without a doubt it was a shock. The demand was just incredible, and we wanted to ensure that we provided even access to all customers, resulting

in some tough decisions needing to be made. Like everyone in the supply chain, it came at a high cost base and we had to navigate our way through that.

We ensured we had a Covid safe plan in place and put most of our resources into focusing on the supply chain team and product sourcing. We had our office staff packed up and working from home before the lockdown. We also split all our warehouse teams into two shifts to reduce the number of people in the warehouse at any given time. We also put in place new cleaning protocols that were undertaken between each shift. As we service the entire healthcare sector including hospitals and aged care facilities, we prepared for the worst and hoped for the best. So far, we've had no major issues.

There were definitely a few weeks there where we had to work our way through the emotional turmoil with customers, suppliers and our own team, but we pulled it together to ensure we were transparent about what we could and couldn't do. While we may not have got everything right, I'm very proud of what the team has done and continues to do for the sector

**Now that the 7CPA is finalised, focus turns to the CSO deed. Are there any elements you see that need to be addressed?**

Personally, I think it works well and there isn't too much I'd change. From suppliers, to our customers, to working with the Pharmacy Guild, I'm very clear that I prefer honest and transparent relationships. I don't particularly like getting into the politics of it all.

We do want to service our customers to the highest standard and there's

a cost associated with doing that. We need a balanced approach in supporting the level of service with the cost involved and if we're all pragmatic about that, there'll always be a good middle ground that ensures we continue to supply all Australians with the medicines they need when they need them.

**What are your short-term priorities with the business?**

CH2 will continue to offer an alternative to the market as the independent, national wholesaler. We're now truly cemented in the sector and while I'm sure some have hoped we'd go away, we're here to stay. We've provided community pharmacies with a very good alternative and competition that has seen benefits transpire that have resulted in interesting outcomes.

I can't believe how much the sands have shifted since we were first listed and how tough it was at times. But again, I'm truly proud of our team and very thankful to our pharmacies, who've been loyal and willing to work with us as we build the business. We still have a long way to go, but we're well and truly down the path now.

**What's your message to pharmacy on the relationship you seek?**

We want long-term partners that we can grow together with. We're no longer the new entrant, and we have a few years of experience under our belts now. Thank you all those that have supported us along the way. We're excited about the future and what we can achieve. CH2 looks forward to continuing to work with pharmacies across Australia.