

CASE STUDY

GROWING A SUCCESSFUL COMPOUNDING PHARMACY: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING



Ndidiamaka (Didi) Okpareke,
PharmD RPh

Pharmacist, Founder
~ Olive Tree Compounding
Pharmacy

THE JOURNEY FROM START-UP TO A FLOURISHING BUSINESS

After graduating with honors from the University of New Mexico College of Pharmacy, Ndidiamaka (Didi) Okpareke, PharmD RPh spent nearly a decade in various retail and hospital pharmacy roles. She returned to New Mexico in 2016 to begin working toward realizing her dream of becoming an entrepreneur. A year later, Okpareke opened the doors of the Olive Tree Compounding Pharmacy in Rio Rancho.

As founder and sole pharmacist, Okpareke began by compounding non-sterile medications for families and pets. From the start, the pharmacy followed all relevant US Pharmacopeia (USP) guidelines, including USP 795 for non-sterile preparations and USP 800 for hazardous materials necessary for compounding medications. Over time, Okpareke hired a Pharmacy Assistant and Pharmacy Technician. "Together, the three of us built Olive Tree from the ground up," she says. "It was really like a grassroots movement." In fact, they were so successful she realized they could achieve more.

To continue growing, Okpareke knew they would need a bigger space – but the entrepreneur in her also knew she wanted it to be her own space. So, in 2020, she began building a commercial real estate practice that led to a new facility. Still located in Rio Rancho, the 6,000-square-foot building houses Olive Tree and has additional space for rent.

THE CHALLENGE: MOVING TO AUTOMATED ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

Okpareke's vision was to add compounded sterile medications to Olive Tree's offering. To support that, she decided to build a clean room suite that included a clean room, an ante-room and a room for compounding hazardous materials. "To me, having an amazing environmental monitoring system is essential to building a clean room suite," she says.

In their previous space, they monitored pressure and temperature manually using a data logger. "We would dock the logger every morning, and it would tell us what the temperature and pressure had been for the last 24 hours," she explains. While this worked well for their needs at the time, with the

CASE STUDY



plan to expand into sterile medications — Okpareke knew she wanted to automate as many processes as possible. Her plan was to install a system that monitored the pressure and temperature as well as humidity continuously.

When construction on the facility was wrapping up in April of 2024, Okpareke visited the site and found that the HVAC subcontractor had only installed a HEPA filter. "I asked when the environmental monitoring system would be going in — and realized pretty quickly he didn't understand what I needed," Okpareke recalls. The problem? The State Board of Pharmacy was due to inspect Olive Tree's new space in less than a week. That's when she remembered meeting a representative from Rees Scientific at a recent APC event. "The rep walked me through everything at the show and I thought it was very cool," she says. "Honestly, though, I thought it was probably more sophisticated than anything we'd ever need." She walked away thinking Rees' systems were meant for government labs and other large, high-level operations.

Still, Okpareke knew they'd be able to help her — even if that meant simply pointing her in the right direction, so she decided to reach out. "I literally sent an email while I was sitting in the parking lot of my new building, minutes after my conversation with the HVAC contractor." As it turned out, there was a Rees representative in Albuquerque that day who could meet her within hours.

What happened next was nothing short of a miracle.

THE SOLUTION: AN AUTOMATED ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING SYSTEM IN LESS THAN A WEEK

"I told the rep from Rees what I was looking for and that it needed to be fast to install and easy to use," explains Okpareke. "He knew exactly what would work for us, and I had a quote in my hand before the end of the day — which I approved right away." Two days later, a Rees technician came to the site with all the necessary equipment and installation began. "Everything was in place and working in time for the State Board of Pharmacy inspection," she adds. "I still can't believe it."

Okpareke had her Pharmacy Tech go through the training process with Rees on how to use the system. However, she says once she got through the inspection and logged on for the first time — she found it all pretty intuitive. "Even though I didn't go through any formal training — I got the hang of it pretty quickly. With a few clicks, I can see the readouts I need on all the environmental markers we are measuring."

The Rees monitoring system is already doing its job. "Almost immediately, the system was telling me that the pressure in our USP 800 room was too low," explains Okpareke. That means Olive Tree can't start compounding anything that involves hazardous materials because it puts whoever is working in the room at risk of absorbing harmful particles. Rees sent a technician to re-evaluate the system and confirm it was working properly. "I have to say, I was impressed by her thoroughness," Okpareke says. "She didn't just check that everything was plugged in and running, — she looked at every single connection." The next step is for her contractor to conduct a Testing, Adjusting and Balance assessment to check airflow in the HVAC system so they can map back to the original plan and determine what's causing the issue.

CASE STUDY

In addition to complying with USP 795, 800 — and now 797 for sterile compounding — Olive Tree also follows all Federal Drug Administration (FDA) and Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) as well as State Board of Pharmacy requirements. The pharmacy goes through an external certification process every six months for the rooms and hoods used for compounding. This includes taking air samples and samples from the hood to verify there is no bacterial growth, as well as measuring pressure to ensure it is in range.

THE RESULT: A SCALABLE SYSTEM THAT POSITIONS OLIVE TREE FOR FUTURE GROWTH

Today, Olive Tree has nine employees — and Okpareke says there's so much more they want to do. "Once we start compounding sterile medications, I think we will grow quickly. It's wonderful knowing I have a partner I can trust." That, she says, comes down to the people at Rees. "From the first day, I've received nothing less than white glove service, and everyone I've encountered has been very professional and highly knowledgeable."

Of course, the ease of use and reliability of the system itself is critical. "With a system like this in place, I know I can grow in the right way — not only in terms of compliance but also for the safety of our patients and staff." What's more, she adds that because Rees has so many options, she can definitely see upgrading as the pharmacy continues to expand its scope.

Okpareke's advice to others? "No matter how small your operation or how big you want to grow it — Rees has a solution that will take manual environmental monitoring off your plate. Plus, you'll have a knowledgeable, responsive team behind you that supports your vision and goals every step of the way. That's invaluable."