Day in the life of a Hospital Pharmacist

The prescribing of medication is the most common healthcare intervention for a patient, and is normally the main course of treatment for the vast majority.

In the average general hospital, 97% of patients will be taking medicines. Medicines account for 5% of the total NHS expenditure which is approximately £11 billion per annum and ABM’s expenditure on medicines is about £160 million per year.

Hospital pharmacists are experts in the field of medicines and provide a wide range of services which can be classified as:

- **Technical** – Purchasing, storage, manufacture, dispensing, quality testing and supply of all the medicines used in the hospital
- **Clinical** - The pharmacist is an integral part of the healthcare team where the focus is firmly on patients

They work on a daily basis with doctors, nurses and other members of multidisciplinary teams to advise on the selection of medicine, the dose and route of administration for individual patients, such as tablet, injection, ointment or inhaler.

They provide information about potential side effects and ensure that new treatments are compatible with existing medication and monitor the effects of treatment to ensure that it is safe and effective.

Specialist advice is provided for patients who should not take certain medications, for example patients with conditions such as heart failure, kidney or liver disease and for pregnant or breast feeding women.

For inpatients, pharmacists carry out daily ward rounds to check the drug charts of each patient. If a patient is new to the ward, the pharmacist will need to check their notes to see why they have been admitted, and to gain more information about the patient’s medical history and what medication they are taking. This involves close co-operation with GP surgeries and primary care pharmacy teams.

The pharmacist will then work with individual patients to help select the most appropriate therapy, taking account of factors including their existing medication, medical history, lifestyle and ability to understand and follow a treatment plan.

*Picture: Alison Williams, Pharmacist at Neath Port Talbot Hospital, checks a patient’s drug chart as part of her daily rounds*
Once a patient is ready to be discharged, any medication they need to take home has to be checked by the pharmacist. The patient is then counselled to make sure they are aware of what they have been prescribed and the instructions they need to follow. Pharmacists also help transfer the information from patients’ drug charts into an electronic version which is then sent to the patient’s GP. This improves medicine reconciliation between primary and secondary care, stops medicines being continued or discontinued inadvertently and allows surgeries to update computer medication history in a timely fashion.

Outpatients seen in clinics across the hospital also use the services of the pharmacist. If a patient is given a prescription during their appointment, they then take it to the pharmacy where they will check it is correct and supervise dispensing of the medication. Certain specialist drugs, for example cancer therapies or medication that requires active on-going monitoring and drugs prescribed only by specialist medical staff, make up the majority of these prescriptions.

Pharmacist Alison Williams has been a member of the department at Neath Port Talbot Hospital for the past five years:

“I absolutely love my job. You are able to liaise with so many people as we all work as a multi disciplinary team. The job is busy, and teaches you to prioritise. It’s challenging and stimulating, and you are always learning something new, especially on the wards.

“I also really enjoy the patient contact, it provides an opportunity for patients to learn more about their medication, as they are able to ask us about any aspect of their therapy they have been prescribed. The face to face contact helps to reinforce the advice, and make patients feel more confident.”

As well as providing advice on the wards for patients, Alison is part of a multidisciplinary team that delivers pulmonary rehabilitation sessions in Neath Port Talbot Community Resource Centre for patients with chronic chest conditions. Alison gives a regular presentation on the medications to treat these conditions. Many of the therapies used come in specialist inhaler devices and patients are assessed for the most suitable drug and device and Alison has also qualified as an independent prescriber in this field. Additionally she is able to answer patients’ questions about other medication that they are taking for related or different conditions.

Pharmacists at Neath Port Talbot Hospital provide a monitoring clinic for patients taking medication which thins the blood. Pharmacists adjust dosages for patients based on a blood test reading, taking into account the reason for treatment, current medication, advancement of condition and diet.

The clinic holds around 2000 appointments per month and provides an instant blood test result, which enables the patient and pharmacist to discuss the results face to face.
Pharmacists also work in a medicines information department where, using a range of reference sources, they provide detailed information to healthcare professionals about any aspect of medicines usage.

Pharmacists are involved in the manufacture of medicines when ready made preparations are not available. The licensed unit at Neath Port Talbot Hospital provides over 300,000 items per year both internally and externally.

Specialist cancer treatments and intravenous nutrition are prepared on the Singleton and Morriston sites. These are tailor made under sterile conditions for individual patients and preparation requires a high degree of training, manipulation and skill. Specialised roles in other areas such as procurement, radiotherapy, quality assurance and education and training also exist.