

Pharmacy for mental health

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She has been part of the New Roles in Mental Health programme for the past two years, contributing to the Pharmacy and Pharmacy Technician work firstly in the Task and Finish Group (2018-2019) and this year leading the Implementation Group (2019-2020).

Here is what she has to say about pharmacy and mental health:

What contribution does pharmacy make to mental health?

Pharmacy for mental health is about providing bespoke individualised care because every person with a mental health problem has different needs. Mental health pharmacy professionals are trained and specialise in mental health, but individuals in their care often have physical health needs as well. We know people with mental health conditions have a higher risk of physical health problems, which can result in reduced life expectancy – by as much as 15 to 20 years. Therefore, the development of pharmacy professionals in mental and physical health medicines optimisation is essential. Our role is pro-active; we look out for the development of certain signs and symptoms, including adverse reactions to medicines. We offer preventive approaches and make recommendations about health and lifestyle so individuals could bolster their physical or mental health.

Our ambitions for mental health pharmacy are to ensure people with mental health problems can receive advice and guidance about their medicines in any setting to enable people to access good pharmacy and medicines support we need to ensure that the pharmacy workforce has the right knowledge, skills and behaviours.

The first step to ensuring people receive good pharmacy and medicines support is to increase exposure to mental health pharmacy. This raises awareness of the management of mental health problems, offers opportunities to gain greater knowledge about the impact of medicines used to manage mental health conditions and gives pharmacy professionals the confidence to talk to people about mental health medicines. It may also bring mental health pharmacy into focus as a future career pathway and encourage pharmacy professionals to develop as a specialist mental health professional supporting the ambitions in the Mental Health Implementation Plan.

We wanted to understand better what experience/opportunities were currently available in mental health settings, particularly during initial education and training and in early years, and make recommendations for increasing undergraduate, pre-registration and early year's placements in mental health settings. We would also like to develop rotational preceptorship programmes offering experience in mental health settings.

People with mental health problems present in general practices and community pharmacies as well as hospitals. So all pharmacy professionals need to feel confident and equipped to have the right conversation with that individual. To provide appropriate information and advice about their medicines but also know where to signpost them to other services or support if needed. To meet this need, we developed a [core mental health competency framework](#), rather than a specialist one; to guide and develop non mental health specialist pharmacy teams when supporting individuals with mental health problems, within their sector of practice

The development of the framework was overseen by a steering group comprising of broad representation of mental health specialists who drafted the initial competencies. User testing was undertaken with groups of community, acute and general practice pharmacy professionals. This framework is intended to bring together the skills, behaviours and attitudes expected of pharmacy teams to support people with mental health problems across all sectors of pharmacy. The framework is now available for wider comment. Please provide any feedback on the framework by 2 November 2020 by emailing mentalhealth@hee.nhs.uk.

The ultimate goal is to improve care by ensuring that all pharmacy professionals that people encounter and interact with have a good understanding of mental health conditions and their management with medicines. Pharmacy professionals will use their established and developing pharmacy knowledge, skills and behaviours to optimise medicines use for individuals with mental health conditions across all sectors. They will also be more aware of the limits of their competence and confidence and know where to signpost or refer individuals to.

Pharmacy in different settings

New ways of working - upskilling and expansion of roles

An important aspect of our task and finish group work was to understand what the workforce looks like for mental health pharmacy, both where and how they work. We looked to explore, collate and analyse data on innovative and extended roles within mental health pharmacy, to explore the workforce and skills gap across the entire pharmacy workforce within and across all sectors of pharmacy.

An example of an extended innovative role involves mental health pharmacists outreaching into GP surgeries, thereby providing a mental health specialism in the

primary care sector. There are pharmacists working in care homes with specialist mental health experience and knowledge as well as those working in the community settings. Such innovations describe and exemplify the workforce transformations that have and continue to take place for others to aspire too. They also illustrate the breadth and expansion of mental health pharmacy to support the patient journey within and across sectors.

The task and finish group

We began this phase of the work by taking an in-depth look at how the expansion and development of both community and hospital pharmacy roles could help achieve the objectives of Stepping Forward and the Long Term Plan.

What was valuable about being part of this work was sharing learning and ideas with the other new roles task and finish groups, how the roles they were developing or expanding related to pharmacy, and what some of our common aspirations and challenges might be.

Bringing our ideas to life

We developed a detailed survey to scope and report on the opportunities for early year's pharmacy professionals to gain experience in mental health. Due to Covid-19 we had to pause initially but have been able to go back out to survey individuals and organisations to help understand the placement opportunities that exist and those that could be developed. Additionally, the survey data may help inform the impact that the early years mental health experience has on recruitment, the benefits of rotational posts and opportunities to gain mental health experience in non mental health settings. Our early findings from this preliminary work indicate that early exposure has a positive influence upon future careers; rotational posts have benefit for trainees and should include a mental health component however mental health training can occur beyond the specialist setting.

As a progression to the early year's opportunities, we were keen to identify what extended and innovative roles mental health pharmacy professionals were undertaking in the delivery of care to patients suffering from illness related to mental health. From this scoping it is evident that a clear pipeline of suitably trained staff, pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and pharmacy assistants is required to support development of these new ways of working. Integrated working between STP workforce lead/transformation leads and local mental health pharmacy system leads nationally is variable, thus impacting negatively on the sustainable establishment of extended roles for pharmacy professionals in mental health. Although happening, approaches to sharing, spread and adoption of innovative practice across local

systems, STP's and regions is variable and therefore further work is needed to share exemplars of practice.

The projects collectively provide a foundation for improving pharmacy and medicines support to people with mental health problems within all sectors of health and care. This is by developing the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the whole pharmacy professional workforce and identifying opportunities for increasing experience of mental health care so that there is a stronger pipeline of pharmacy professionals wanting to develop as mental health specialists. It has also showcased the possibilities for expanded pharmacy roles. This will all underpin the work that is now starting to develop an education and training framework for 260 specialist mental health pharmacists to work as part of multidisciplinary mental health teams in the community.