

## **Community Pharmacy – a career of choice in Scotland**

### **What do we mean by a community pharmacy?**

A community pharmacy is where people go to get medicines, ask for advice on their health or how best to take their medicines, and to access NHS Scotland and private health services. Community pharmacies are convenient to patients, open longer hours than other health professionals and do not need appointments to be made. Health advice in a pharmacy could be for treatment and care for a minor condition, such as cold, flu or a rash. Medicines can be bought in pharmacies or can be provided by the National Health Service (NHS). An NHS supply of medicine is often when a patient has been given a prescription form by a health professional, usually their doctor, which they take or get sent to the pharmacy. All Scottish pharmacies can also provide expert advice and appropriate NHS medicines free of charge for patients coming to the pharmacy for advice on a minor illness. NHS services available at community pharmacies include support and treatment to help people stop smoking, support for people who have problems through the use of illegal drugs, for sexual health advice such as emergency hormonal contraception (known as the morning after pill), or help for people with specific health conditions. Community Pharmacies may also provide flu and travel vaccinations or be involved in other services to promote health for patients. Pharmacies are often on the High Street but can also be attached to Health Centres. Pharmacies can be part of large chain retail groups such as Boots the Chemists, inside supermarkets or a small business with one pharmacy.

### **What is it like in a community pharmacy?**

A community pharmacy is a very busy environment. Pharmacy teams deal with the many people who visit the pharmacy to buy medicines, ask for health advice, access health services or to collect prescription medicines. The pharmacy team will also be preparing medicines for delivery to patients at home or in care homes. The phone in a pharmacy is always busy with calls from patients and other health professionals including doctors to make sure each medicine is safe and effective for each individual. Pharmacies usually have an area where the public can browse health products, ask for medicines, speak to a member of the pharmacy team or to wait for their medicines to be ready. Most pharmacies have a private area where patients can have a confidential consultation with the pharmacist. Pharmacies will have a larger area, called the dispensary, behind a counter and not accessible by the public where medicines are stored, prepared and computer patient records are completed.

All activities in a community pharmacy are in the control of a pharmacist. It is the role of the pharmacist to ensure medicines supplied to patients are from a reputable source ensuring quality, and that medicines are supplied legally and checked as being clinically suitable for each patient. Each pharmacy is registered with and inspected by an organisation which sets high standards that pharmacies must comply with to protect the safety of patients. The pharmacist in the pharmacy works with a team of other trained community pharmacy team members to ensure these standards are met so people get their medicines and advice safely and effectively.

### **Who works in a community pharmacy?**

The community pharmacy team will include

- Pharmacist (at least one)
- Pharmacy technicians
- Dispensary Assistants
- Healthcare Assistants
- Delivery Drivers (not always)

#### **Pharmacist**

What is a Pharmacist?

A pharmacist is a health professional who is expert in medicines. A pharmacist will have completed a university degree in Pharmacy, and a period of working in pharmacy supported by another pharmacist as their tutor. They will be registered with an organisation called the General Pharmaceutical Council and will maintain the standards of that organisation including making the patient centre to the care they provide and keeping their medicine knowledge up to date. A pharmacist is responsible for the care of patients with regards to their

medicines. Pharmacists can work in hospital, doctor surgeries, community pharmacy and in laboratories in the development of new medicine industry.

What skills and qualifications do I need to become a pharmacist?

To go to university to become a pharmacist you need to be good at sciences with at least good Scottish Higher grades in chemistry, physics or biology and maths. English Higher is required for most university degrees. A pharmacist who works in a community pharmacy will be listening to patients a lot of the time to provide appropriate advice, so communication skills are very important. Pharmacists receive a lot of training in communication skills to use in patient consultations and discussion with other health professionals. Community Pharmacists need to be good at continuously working accurately, as throughout their day they will be doing many calculations of medicine dose and quantity in the checking of prescription details, all under pressure for time and with distractions. All pharmacists need to know how medicines work in the body, have a good knowledge of health and know the laws regarding medicine supply. Pharmacists respect patients being at the centre of their own care and understand how to protect patients' rights including confidentiality.

Why would I want to be a pharmacist?

Being a pharmacist is a very rewarding profession. You are a highly respected expert health professional leading a trained team to care for patients. It is your interaction with people that can help people to understand how to keep well, how to get the best from their medicine and to know when to seek further support with their health.

### **Pharmacy Technician**

What is a Pharmacy technician?

A pharmacy technician is a professional working in a pharmacy who will prepare medicines for patients. They are registered and comply with the same regulatory organisation as pharmacists. Pharmacy technicians are responsible for their own safe practice and must keep their skills up to date. Pharmacy technicians can work in community pharmacy, GP practices, and hospitals.

What skills and qualifications do I need to become a Pharmacy technician?

You need to work in a pharmacy and complete a Diploma Level 3 course which covers 21 different aspects of pharmacy practice. The course involves considerable study amounting to around 15 hours a week for two years, with written assessments covering the knowledge and competency requirements with face to face assessments. Pharmacies are very busy workplaces and can have unpredictable workload so you may need at times to study at home outside working hours. In general the cost of the course is covered by the employer. You will need to have entry qualifications or equivalent of National 5 English, Maths and Science at C, and personal references before you start the course. You may have already completed a Healthcare assistant or Dispensary assistant course. You will like being part of a close working team and be able to work in a continuous learning environment.

Why would I want to become a Pharmacy technician?

You will gain a highly sought after professional qualification whilst working and earning. You will work in a team in a healthcare environment to support patients get their medicines safely and effectively. You will be supporting health services which make a difference to patients. You will be accountable for your own practice and may have a leadership role in your pharmacy.

You could do a further training course in the workplace to check your accuracy when preparing medicines. This is completed over several months with a final test to enable you to become an Accuracy Checker Pharmacy Technician which gives you the responsibility of giving patients the correct medicines as directed by the prescription from their doctor, pharmacist, nurse or dentist.

## **Dispensary Assistant**

What is a Dispensary Assistant?

As a dispensary assistant in a community pharmacy you will be preparing medicines to be checked by a pharmacist before giving to a patient. You will read patient prescription forms, select correct medicines from the dispensary stock, prepare the correct quantity, and record your activity through a computer system before labelling the medicines. You will have responsibility for ordering medicines and keeping the pharmacy stock neat and tidy. You may be working with Pharmacy technicians and you may also have healthcare assistant training.

What skills and qualifications do I need to become a Dispensary Assistant?

You need to work in a pharmacy dispensary, which is the part of the pharmacy not open to the public where medicines are prepared. Within 3 months of starting to work in the dispensary you need to be enrolled on a Dispensary assistant course. The course is completed in the pharmacy and takes between six months and a year. The course consists of four workbooks each taking around 20 hours of study time, some of which may need to be completed in your own time. There are no formal entry qualifications however the modules do contain some aspects of calculations including fractions and percentages, some study of the legal side of pharmacy and an introduction to stock control.

Why would I want to be a Dispensary Assistant?

You will work in a team in a fast paced, professional healthcare environment supporting patients to get their medicines safely and effectively. You will be supporting health services which make a difference to patients. This role can be a stepping stone to becoming a Pharmacy technician professional.

## **Healthcare Assistant**

What is a Healthcare Assistant?

A Healthcare Assistant is very often the first member of staff a person meets when they come to a community pharmacy. A healthcare assistant will have the essential knowledge to be able to supply medicines, under the supervision of a pharmacist, for the most common clinical conditions people experience such as pain, cough, hay fever or skin problems and be able to provide appropriate healthcare advice. Healthcare assistants will be able to explain and support patients to access the services available from the pharmacy and will understand when to involve other members of the pharmacy team.

What do I need to become a Healthcare Assistant?

There are no formal qualifications to become a Healthcare Assistant however within three months of starting to work at the medicine counter in a community pharmacy you will be required to enrol on a Healthcare Assistant course. This course will provide the product knowledge of medicines available to buy and build confidence in this support role for patients. The course is completed in the workplace using workbooks and multiple choice questionnaires. The course will take 6 months to a year to complete with a regular couple of hours each week dedicated to learning. You will be the first point of contact with patients, responding to patient queries about medicines and signposting to other team members, so good communication skills and being a "people person" is vital.

Why would I want to be a Healthcare Assistant?

You will work in a team in a fast paced, professional healthcare environment supporting patients to get their medicines safely and effectively. You will be supporting health services which make a difference to patients. This role is a stepping stone to becoming a Community Pharmacy Dispensary Assistant. On occasion there is the opportunity to train in a joint course covering both healthcare and dispensary assistant roles.

## **Medicine Delivery Driver**

What is a Medicine delivery driver?

A Medicine delivery driver will take medicines prepared by the pharmacy team to a patient's home. A patient may have their prescription delivered rather than collected by themselves as they may be housebound, live in

a care home or have another reason why they cannot come into the pharmacy. Deliveries are collected by the driver, recorded and planned daily by pharmacy medicine delivery drivers. It is important medicine delivery drivers understand the law around medicines, and take care to support patient confidentiality.

What do I need to become a Medicine delivery driver?

Within three months of starting a Medicine Delivery driver role, you will need to have training in the knowledge essential to the role of delivering medicines to ensure the safety of patients and reduce the risk of errors. You will be an experienced driver with driving license without endorsements and have Disclosure Scotland checks.

Why would I want to be a Medicine delivery driver?

This is a responsible role with regular patient contact. You will be in a team in a fast paced, professional healthcare environment supporting patients to get their medicines safely and effectively.

**For Further information:**

For more information on studying to become a pharmacist:

[www.rgu.ac.uk/study/courses/883-mpharm-pharmacy](http://www.rgu.ac.uk/study/courses/883-mpharm-pharmacy)

[www.strath.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate/pharmacy/](http://www.strath.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate/pharmacy/)

For more information on working in community pharmacy:

[www.npa.co.uk](http://www.npa.co.uk), [www.thecca.org](http://www.thecca.org), [www.cps.scot](http://www.cps.scot)