

Who's who in a Community Pharmacy?

A brief by Lancashire and South Cumbria Local Professional Network (LPN) - Pharmacy

Background

There are a number of different clinicians working in Community Pharmacy with a confusing array of titles and responsibilities.

Pharmacists and their training

Pharmacists are experts in medicines who perform various roles to ensure optimal health outcomes for their patients through the quality use of medicines and support patients in managing minor illnesses.

The underlying principle for all pharmacy education and training is ensuring safe and effective care for patients. This principle underpins pharmacists' work throughout their undergraduate, postgraduate and continued learning and subsequent career pathway.

Students undertake a four-year Masters in Pharmacy degree course that teaches them about the origin and chemistry of drugs, the preparation and formulation of medicines and the actions and uses of medicines including physiology, biochemistry, microbiology, pathology and pharmacology.

After the degree course the student undertakes a one-year placement working in a pharmacy under the supervision of an experienced pharmacist. At the end of this year, they take a professional examination and those who successfully complete the examination can register as a pharmacist with the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC)¹, the pharmacy regulator.

Pharmacists continue to keep their knowledge up to date during their career by undertaking continuing professional development.

Without a pharmacist on duty the pharmacy and the team are unable to operate.

¹ <https://www.pharmacyregulation.org/> the General Pharmaceutical Council who regulate pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and pharmacies in Great Britain.

Registered Pharmacy Technician

Registered Pharmacy Technicians are professionally skilled and essential members of the pharmacy team, who broadly prepare, dispense, supply and issue a wide range and variety of medicines to patients. Whilst they work under the supervision of the pharmacist, Pharmacy Technicians are responsible and accountable for their own accurate and safe practice.

Registered with the GPhC for their license to practice, taking two years to qualify. The Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK² (APTUK) is the professional leadership body for Pharmacy Technicians.

Accredited Checking Technician (ACT)

ACTs are pharmacy support staff that have undertaken additional training to allow them to undertake an accuracy check of dispensed medicines. The pharmacist will undertake a clinical check of the prescription during the dispensing process but working with an ACT means the pharmacist does not need to undertake the final accuracy check of the dispensed medicines in most circumstances.

An increasing number of community pharmacies are supporting members of their dispensing team to qualify as ACTs in order to improve the efficiency of the dispensing process and to free up pharmacist time to allow them to deliver other services.

Dispenser/ Dispensing Assistants

Dispensers support the pharmacist in the dispensing of prescriptions and the management of dispensary stock. They will also generally fulfil the roles of a Medicine Counter Assistant (see below) when required. It is a professional requirement that dispensing assistants are competent in the areas in which they are working to a minimum standard equivalent to the Pharmacy Services Scottish/National Vocational Qualification (S/NVQ) level 2 qualification or undertaking training towards this.

Medicines Counter Assistants (MCA) /Healthcare Assistants

MCAs are generally the first point of contact for patients providing a wide range of functions to support the delivery of services and the retail functions of the pharmacy. They undertake the prescription reception process, including supporting patients to complete the declarations on NHS prescriptions. Advice on the treatment of self-limiting illness and basic healthy lifestyle support will be provided by MCAs working to a protocol and under the supervision of the pharmacist. Some MCAs will provide aspects of NHS commissioned services, such as NHS Health Checks, following appropriate training and accreditation.

² <https://www.aptuk.org/>

It is a professional requirement that any assistant who is given delegated authority to sell medicines under a protocol should have undertaken, or be undertaking, an accredited course relevant to their duties.

Delivery Drivers

The delivery drivers can collect prescriptions from doctors' surgeries, and deliver medicines to patient's homes and care homes.

They have undergone training including working in a Pharmacy Environment, Teamwork and Person-Centered Care, and a technical module on Medicines and Prescriptions.

All the above roles have to complete training recognised by the GPhC

Community Pharmacy

A community pharmacy (sometimes known as a "chemist") is a place, registered with the GPhC, where medicines are compounded or dispensed, and services are provided by a pharmacist and their team.

They can be found in a variety of areas including High Street locations, residential neighbourhoods, supermarkets, travel hubs, and Health centers.