

Pharmacy services at the Glastonbury Festival: come along and join the party

Tony Guest, Jim Hutchins, Lucy Philpott, Sue Beveridge, Sally Tothill and Louise Flower describe the Glastonbury pharmacy experience

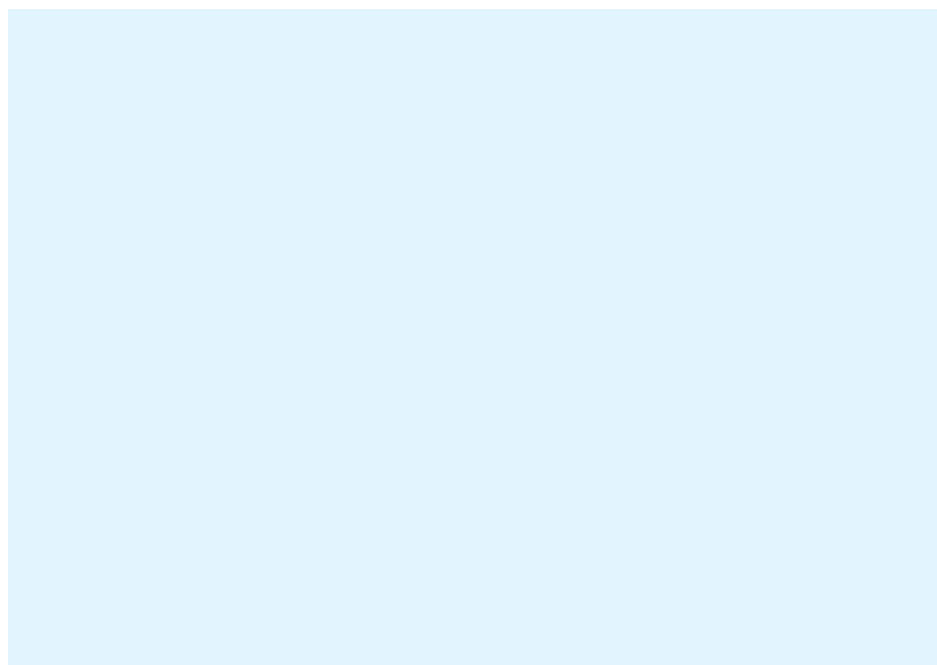
Glastonbury is the place to be seen. The annual festival of contemporary performing arts has a world reputation for its diversity and attracting the best. From its humble, free beginnings in a farmer's field in 1970 celebrating "peace and love" it now occupies a site of 900 acres, one and a half miles across, with 11 major stages and numerous minor ones.

Because of the concerns of the police and local authorities the site is now enclosed by a five mile long, 10 foot high fence, separated from a second fence by a no man's land patrolled constantly by teams of security staff.

The present licence is for 120,000 paying visitors and an additional 34,000 site staff, stage crews and exhibitors. All of these effectively occupy a tented township for up to seven days in isolated Somerset fields at the end of June each year.

Medical care is needed to cover problems with pre-existing conditions, acute health problems and accidents and emergencies on site. There is a separate welfare provision team that issues condoms and operates a needle exchange scheme. The medical facility has had to expand from its early days in a farmhouse bedroom to a full scale field hospital at the top of the site and a secondary unit at the other extremity. There are now 500 medical staff, including pharmacists, nurses, midwives, doctors, anaesthetists, surgeons, psychiatrists, social workers, physiotherapists, podiatrists and dentists. The medical unit provides teams of paramedics with their own ambulances and an on site medical communication system, as well as the first-aid units around site.

The first registered pharmacy premises with an NHS dispensing contract, essential for large numbers of people on limited incomes to obtain necessary medicines, was set up in a cabin unit in 1994 by John Higginbotham. It was staffed by employees from his Shepton Mallet pharmacy. One of the authors (TG) ran the on site pharmacy from 1998 with a remit to restrict the stock to a limited formulary, which was agreed with



Jason Bryant

Visitors and staff effectively occupy a tented township in isolated Somerset fields

the medical unit, and to obtain additional items when required from the Shepton Mallet pharmacy.

On his retirement in 2000, John Higginbotham sold the dispensing contract and pharmacy title of Festival Pharmacy to Festival Health Ltd.

With no festival in 2001, we took a long look at the organisation of the pharmacy and identified several areas that required attention. These included:

- Service provision to the medical unit
- Online medicines information
- Dispensary stock
- Wholesaler delivery
- Opening hours
- Staffing
- Health promotion
- The need for a second pharmacy on site

Service provision to the medical unit

The Festival Pharmacy, based within the medical unit, dispenses all prescriptions written by the medical staff. This provides several challenges that are not always faced in community pharmacy.

First, many of the medical staff are usually based in hospitals and may not be familiar with general practice prescribing. Secondly, there is a lack of patient medication or disease history, and finally, there is an increased risk of interactions with drugs of abuse.

Part of our new remit is to facilitate supply of surgical and clinical items. The medical unit starts off with an envisaged level of stock but inevitably finds it has exhausted some items or requires emergency supplies of more specialised medicines. As a dispensing pharmacy we do not have access to hospital wholesalers. We resource items from hospitals as far away as Bristol but this is unsatisfactory during a night-time emergency, although in one critical situation we did succeed in getting a supply flown in. We have identified a hospital wholesaler that will supply directly to the doctors, however this method has the same limitations. Our on-call arrangement with a pharmacy wholesaler is mentioned below.

We have increased the proportion of pharmacists who have relevant clinical experience and are working towards one clinical pharmacist and one experienced community pharmacist working during each shift.

Underlying these changes is the stark responsibility of an adequate pharmacy response to any of the major incident scenarios on site. Major incident planning involves the police, local authority, off-site emergency services, site organisers and on-site medical services.

Medicines information online

In 2003 we established a dedicated online medicines information facility within the pharmacy.

Tony Guest, MRPharmS, is superintendent pharmacist, Festival Health Ltd

Jim Hutchins, MRPharmS, is managing pharmacist, Arena Pharmacy

Lucy Philpott, MRPharmS, is managing pharmacist, Festival Pharmacy

Sue Beveridge, MRPharmS, is support pharmacist, Arena Pharmacy

Sally Tothill, EN, and **Louise Flower, BA**, are staff managers, Festival Health Ltd

The aim was to:

- Back up the internal activity of the pharmacy
- Provide a level of expertise to the medical staff in their clinical activities in the “field hospital”
- Provide specialist information on the interactions of suspected drugs of abuse in contemplated clinical interventions

Dispensary stock

The original, limited prescribing formulary is still in place although subject to yearly review using data from the previous festival. Its aim is to help doctors, many of whom are from an exclusively hospital environment, to prescribe the simplest, most effective medicine.

We have now vastly increased the range of dispensary stock based on previous festival experience. As with any NHS dispensing pharmacy our stock is influenced by expected demand. One problem is that usage varies each year, often depending on the weather. For example, during a hot, dry year many people suffer from hay fever, sunburn and dehydration, leading to an increased demand for antihistamines and rehydration sachets.

If stocks are exhausted it is the responsibility of the pharmacist on duty to resource a signed order supply from a community pharmacy in the local area, a hospital pharmacy, or from the wholesaler (either next delivery, emergency or out of hours on-call delivery).

Wholesaler delivery

A direct wholesaler supply has been set up. In order to address police concerns over wholesaler van delivery into the site we are required to use a dedicated courier. This has imposed a cost burden on the pharmacy but has proved of benefit in that the courier is on call 24 hours a day. This provides an acceptable way of delivering emergency supplies out of hours. In a critical situation the police have offered to escort or even fly the supply in themselves.

Opening hours

The opening hours have been extended (from 10am to 7pm before 2000) to complement the medical unit requirement. Festival Pharmacy is fully staffed 24 hours a day for six days, starting three days before the festival begins.

Staffing

In 2003 we had 26 pharmacists with a range of specialty experience, including community, clinical and industrial pharmacists. They were supported by 37 qualified dispensing staff, again from community and hospital, other pharmacy staff and some assistants.

Traditionally all medical services staff — from consultants to pharmacy staff — are volunteers. They get free tickets to the festival, car parking and secure camping with their own showers and toilets (a real bonus at Glastonbury!) and access to hot meals and medical mess facilities.

One of the many entertainers who roam around the festival site

Selecting staff and organising work rotas can be a major headache. Many volunteers have individual requirements and the dates they are on site vary enormously, although part of our selection criteria is now the number of days that they are available to work. It is not until volunteers are on site that most find their choice of stage acts conflicts with rota commitments.

One problem for me, as superintendent pharmacist, is to ensure that professional standards are met by all staff. It is easy to be misled by the apparent informality of “pharmacy in the field” in festival surroundings. To this end, four pages of protocols and information are sent to all staff. The signing and return of these constitutes the basis of their contract to work.

The working practice protocols in place in each pharmacy unit are subject to yearly review. In setting the detail we try to keep in mind that they need to be practical and not irksome in their execution.

We are looking for pharmacists and qualified pharmacy staff interested in joining us this year and onwards. Festival 2004 dates are 9am Wednesday 23 June to 5pm Monday 28 June. Staff should be prepared to participate in the spirit of our serious objectives and be available on site for as much of our opening time as possible, and to either set up or clear away. We may be unable to accommodate all shift preferences but try and limit these to six

hours in any 24. Shifts can be busy and might be at unsociable times.

Health promotion

The proportion of festival-goers from “hippy lifestyles” or travellers’ backgrounds has decreased over the years but we still see a disproportionate number. Their health status needs to be considered when giving advice from the pharmacy. There is an active welfare provision team on site and the pharmacy is available for liaison with it. It is encouraging that the medical and nursing staff refer patients to the pharmacy for advice on health issues.

The pharmacy displays health promotion leaflets and staff wear T-shirts that sport the pharmacy logos and a health promotion motif. We were worried that health promotion leaflets might be a little dull but have been enthused by the selection available and have found a wide range that “cut to the chase” in targeting the areas of need among festival-goers. Apart from those displayed within the pharmacy we allocate two display benches outside to promote these leaflets.

Opening a second pharmacy

Before the 2002 festival, an application to register a second pharmacy premises (Arena Pharmacy) in the main festival market area was approved.

At the end of 2001, because of increasing objections to the festival licence, the site organisation was passed to the Mean Fiddler group, which is more business-focused than the original festival management (which still organises the line up of acts). Our main problems in setting up this unit centred on reconciling the concerns and requirements of the police, the local authority and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society with the approach of the site organisers, who viewed this unit as just another market stall. The function of this unit is:

- To make pharmacy services more accessible to festival-goers, in terms of health advice, health promotion and supply of pharmacy and general sale list medicines. The police require that no prescription medicines are held in this unit.
- To generate profit to support the activity of the Festival Pharmacy at the medical unit, which is effectively a loss maker. Even with this contribution the whole pharmacy operation on site has proved only marginally profitable. By arrangement with the medical unit, any overall profit is donated to their charitable funds, in keeping with the spirit of Glastonbury Festival.

One requirement of the police was that the area behind the counter of Arena Pharmacy should be secure. Counters were to enclose the customer area completely and were required to have high fronts. These were custom built to satisfy police requirements.

When we placed Arena Pharmacy in the Glastonbury Festival marketplace, we had no idea what to expect. By the end of the second festival we had a good idea of what to stock and how best to serve the festival-goers. Last year we dealt with thousands of customers. We offered health advice, treatment for minor ailments and made referrals to the doctors in the medical units when appropriate.

Drug misuse at Glastonbury

In the past six years the problems associated with misuse of drugs at Glastonbury Festival have been no worse than those encountered by a community pharmacy in any deprived inner city area, and, in fact, seem to be improving. There seems to be a greater emphasis on the use of "recreational" rather than "hard" drugs. The range is similar to that encountered by many drug welfare workers in a city with a clubbing scene, although most years the medical unit deals with the consequences of some new "exotic cocktail" being circulated. An additional unknown factor may be the wide range of recreational herbal products on sale on some market stalls.

We liaise closely with the police, both those seconded to the site force and those from the surrounding areas. They have major concerns about the security of a dispensing pharmacy in this environment. Traditionally this unit has not dispensed addicts' prescriptions and we have continued this policy in line with renewed police concern. Our approach is that any addict on a programme, including methadone use, should have made arrangements to bring either a supply or daily prescription with them. Along with site welfare services, we will help them to obtain a supply from a pharmacy off the site.

An adequate level of trained staff was not a problem last year and most of the time Arena Pharmacy was staffed by two experienced pharmacists. In addition to the service being constantly praised by customers, the pharmacists found it enjoyable and educational to work alongside others with different styles and areas of expertise.

Daily stock checks and a close relationship with our wholesaler meant that we stayed on top of stock issues. If a product was unavailable an alternative was found — back orders are useless when everyone has gone home.

Big sellers included paracetamol and ibuprofen, but a wide range of medicines were sold in small quantities. There were some surprises. For two years we have stocked emergency hormonal contraception, and had pharmacists trained to sell it, but there has been no demand. This may be because family planning services are available at the festival and prescriptions for EHC are written by festival medical services. Perhaps everyone simply waits until the party is over before worrying — this may be the basis for a health promotion slogan for Glastonbury 2004.

There are enhanced cash security precautions in place and we have a "no heroics" staff policy. To date there has been no trouble but we cannot be complacent.

As with the existing Festival Pharmacy, the new Arena Pharmacy has to conform to the requirements of any pharmacy premises in respect of Data Protection registration, professional indemnity, third party, public liability and contents insurance, health and safety regulations and fire regulations as well as site risk assessments and other requirements to operate on site.

Any provider of a temporary pharmacy at an event or festival will know of the organisational and logistic problems to be overcome within a short time frame. Glastonbury is no different but has the added factors of its scale and the provision of two units on site. Each year we are faced with two secure empty cabins to be fitted out, stocked and staffed within two days and the whole operation to be dismantled and removed within two days of the end of the festival.

At Glastonbury, as with the other major events that we are proposing to target with showcase temporary pharmacies, the involvement of appropriate sponsorship is important. As well as the benefit of product promotion on site there is the spin-off from promotional copy resulting from the event. Our first objective in setting up the new organisation at Glastonbury was that it would absorb the considerable costs of the enhanced service and be seen to stand up financially in its own right. Although still marginal, it has succeeded in doing this. We are now seeking sponsorship for Glastonbury and future events elsewhere.

Profit cannot be the motive for being involved in provision of pharmacy services at Glastonbury Festival. The motivation comes from the challenge of setting up two professionally based pharmacies that function as required and the refreshment of using professional skills in an informal setting — and the sheer buzz of taking part in such a major event.



The Arena Pharmacy was staffed by two experienced pharmacists last year

Contact details

For further information please contact Tony Guest, e-mail tonyguest@btopenworld.com, tel 0114 230 9357, mobile 07850 245131, fax 0114 230 9853