

How practice educator pharmacists help create a positive learning culture

In this article, **Jill McDonald**, on behalf of Thames Valley Practice Educator Pharmacists Group, describes how the introduction of education support pharmacists across Thames Valley Strategic Health Authority has been a success and outlines plans for the future

Before July 2006, Thames Valley Strategic Health Authority covered Buckinghamshire Hospitals NHS Trust, Heatherwood & Wexham Park Hospitals NHS Trust, Milton Keynes General NHS Trust, Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust, Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust and Oxford & Buckinghamshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust. This represents a diverse group of acute hospitals and a correspondingly diverse group of pharmacy departments. Within the Thames Valley boundary there was, until September 2005, no school of pharmacy and no funded regional support structure for pharmacy education and training.

This article describes how Thames Valley SHA addressed the issues of supporting the continued demands of the NHS and the ever increasing training needs of their pharmacy staff, particularly preregistration trainees.

In 2002 some of the Thames Valley hospitals, like those across Britain, had concerns about the impact of the "fallow year" for pharmacy graduates and wondered whether they would be able to sustain their commitments to training alongside service delivery. A business case was written by the chief pharmacists and Thames Valley SHA began to take a closer interest in the issues around pharmacy education and training, and in particular preregistration training. Following a successful pilot project, the SHA undertook a contract review process and decided to fund posts for practice educator pharmacists (PEPs) within each acute hospital trust based on models used in other health care professions, such as nursing and radiography. In funding these posts the SHA aimed to ensure the development of a positive learning environment within every hospital pharmacy department, leading to high quality and equitable training for all preregistration trainees within Thames Valley.

PEPs are practising hospital pharmacists who spend a significant amount of their time dealing with education and training issues. In part their dual role as both practitioners and educators is key to their success. As educators,

PEPs are heavily involved in the day-to-day training of preregistration trainees and provide an extra level of support above that supplied by preregistration tutors alone. This support may be hands-on training and assessment within the hospital, participation in formal teaching as part of the regional preregistration training programme or training of pharmacy staff to ensure they have the appropriate skills to train other staff. In addition to their responsibilities for pre-registration training, PEPs have varying roles in facilitating the education and training of other pharmacy staff. This may be through involvement in the delivery of postgraduate diplomas in clinical pharmacy and pharmacy practice for registered pharmacists, organisation of NVQ training for pharmacy assistants and pharmacy technicians, planning and delivering local education and training programmes to meet the needs of all levels of pharmacy staff and facilitating continuing professional development for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. In short, PEPs are fundamental to ensuring a positive learning culture for everyone working within the pharmacy department.

Achievements of PEPs

Initially the work of the PEPs focused on the development of the regional preregistration training programme. Although there has long been a regional preregistration training co-ordinator, there has been no formalised education and training structure across Thames Valley and therefore the development of the PEP role saw the creation of a ready made "team" to develop the programme. Particular achievements include:

- Creation of an improved learning environment for preregistration trainees and other pharmacy staff
- Development of standardised workbooks for preregistration trainees to use in their base hospitals, including dispensary services, clinical services and quality assurance
- Support for the regional preregistration training co-ordinator in the delivery of the regional preregistration training programme, with PEPs routinely teaching and facilitating workshops and other teaching sessions
- Development and piloting of a peer review tool for preregistration tutors and PEPs providing the opportunity for annual review of progress in relation to preregistration training with colleagues

- Design and implementation of a primary care study day to allow preregistration trainees to learn about the key interface issues from the experts in primary care
- Implementation of a cross sector study day to allow preregistration trainees from hospital and community practice to meet and learn from each other
- Improved assessment and evaluation as part of the regional preregistration training programme
- Completion of a continuing professional development survey among all hospital pharmacists across Thames Valley leading to recommendations made to the Thames Valley Pharmacy Learning and Development Strategy Steering Group
- Participation in the Thames Valley Learning and Development Strategy Steering Group and collaboration in the development of its strategy
- Establishment of a supportive network among PEPs and the provision of support to preregistration trainees across Thames Valley in the event of their tutors or PEPs being absent

The role of the PEP has been successful in developing education and training, and in particular preregistration training. Future work areas are highlighted in the Panel.

Work areas planned

- Implementation of the Thames Valley Pharmacy Learning and Development Strategy to further aid the development of education and training opportunities available to all hospital pharmacy staff across the SHA
- Continued development of the regional preregistration training programme with particular focus on making the Thames Valley more attractive to potential applicants through opens days and promotion
- Full implementation of the recommendations of the work already done on continuing professional development and collaboration with technician trainers to extend this work to pharmacy technicians following registration
- Improved evaluation of the provision of education and training to ensure the maintenance of a high quality of service for our service users
- Evaluation and promotion of the role of PEPs and identification of the benefits of a similar role for support staff

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