

Why there is a green cross by the green

Diane Langleben interviews a pharmacist who has changed the direction of his business and provides pharmacy services at public events

The golf course would probably not be considered a natural setting for a pharmacy but anyone who was fortunate enough to attend the 2007 Open Golf Championship at Carnoustie, Angus, from 19 to 22 July would have spotted such a concern not a 100 yards from the 18th hole. The Medicine Man pharmacy has now become a standard feature of many of the events that mark the British "season". It is the brainchild of pharmacist James Powell, who founded the business in 1999. Mr Powell previously owned two village pharmacies but, concerned about the future, he looked to expand his horizons. One of his pharmacies was on the route of the London to Brighton Bike Ride and one year, he decided to open on the day of the ride, a Sunday. His takings in one morning amounted to more than those in a normal week. Mr Powell realised that taking a pharmacy around the country to various events could be his future. A year later, in 2000, he was the winner of a UniChem Great Business Award for his enterprise.

Mr Powell told *The Journal* that he now attends events from May, starting with the Badminton Horse Trials, to September, when the season ends with the Burley Horse Trials. However, equestrian trials and golf tournaments are not the only occasions where Medicine Man can be found — the Royal Horticultural Society's Hampton Court Palace and Tatton Park flower shows, as well as music festivals, are also venues. Mr Powell explained: "We only attend events that attract upwards of 50,000 visitors." He has devised a questionnaire that is sent to organisers. The higher the score, the more likely it is that Medicine Man will attend. For example, a July event scores higher than one in December. If the intended visitors are predominantly male or young that also gets a high score because they are more disorganised than women who tend to go out with everything they are likely to need for the day, including headache and indigestion remedies. "The young will go to a pop festival armed with nothing other than a bottle of water and then need our help," said Mr Powell.

Foot clinic

This year, Medicine Man pharmacy, in conjunction with Scholl, opened a foot clinic at Carnoustie. In previous years Mr Powell had realised that a substantial part of his business at golf tournaments involved people needing treatment for foot ailments. "People want a good day out, wear their new shoes and then walk eight to 10 miles around the course. Not surprisingly they get sore feet and blisters, for which I recommend the hydrocolloidal group of products," he said. He approached Scholl, which agreed to supply materials and posters. "We also promote general foot care



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and hygiene, and send the clients away with a couple of free samples to try."

The foot clinic was situated in a cordoned-off area of the pharmacy so that clients could be seen in private. Seating was also provided elsewhere so that others could treat themselves. Interestingly, Mr Powell, who advises and treats clients himself, had consultations with 412 people while an on-site podiatrist saw hardly anyone during the four days of the tournament. The worst case Mr Powell had to deal with was a fungal infection under the foot, which had blistered. A secondary infection had then resulted in large sores. Mr Powell had referred the patient to a doctor for an antibiotic prescription, which he then dispensed as well as dressing the sores.

During the Open, the pharmacy dealt with 2,000 transactions, mostly for analgesics, and dispensed 60 private prescriptions, mainly for analgesics, antibiotics and anti-inflammatories. Mr Powell explained: "We maintain a formulary of items that we stock, which we give to the on-site doctors, so that they know what will be available for them to prescribe. We also stock 50 salbutamol inhalers for emergency supply."

Mr Powell and his team of 15, including four or five part-time pharmacists, work a shift system. Pharmacy regulations mean that his pharmacies cannot have wheels. He said:

"We have two dedicated pharmacy units and two more on order. They travel on trailers and are placed in position with forklift trucks. Each unit has a refrigerator and proper storage, and we can be up and running within a half-hour of arrival at an event."

When asked why he practises under such a demanding conditions, Mr Powell replied: "The down sides include: the travelling, I can clock up 30,000 miles in a year; the business is high risk because when the weather is bad we can lose money and I certainly won't make my millions doing it; also, for insurance purposes, I have to sleep on the floor of the shop area, which is in a tent; I am on site 24 hours a day and seldom see much of the events. On the plus side, there is job satisfaction. People are happy, friendly and grateful for the help we can give them. The pharmacy is an oasis in the desert where we can treat complaints that otherwise would ruin people's day out. I have had only two complaints in eight years. My kids enjoy visiting the events for free. Medicine Man pharmacy is a long-term project and I have ideas about setting up franchises in the near future."

A few days after Carnoustie Mr Powell was packing his bags for the Global Gathering and Womad music festivals. And, as *The Journal* was going to press, he was making his way to The Big Chill festival in Malvern.