

Even small changes can help

Technicians who are providing innovative services were given the opportunity to share their experience of good practice at a conference organised by APTUK. Tess Fenn reports

Anthing you can suggest or do that makes a small difference to a patient's quality of life is worthwhile, according to Pippa Scrimshaw, medicines management specialist working in Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust.

Describing her role, Ms Scrimshaw said she helps patients both in hospital and in the community to manage their medicines more effectively. This is done in response to referrals from other health care professionals. Usually, the referred patients are having difficulty taking or remembering to take their medicines, having difficulty swallowing them or are not ordering repeat prescriptions efficiently.

As well as visiting patients in residential homes, she reviews hospital patients and follows up any problems when the patient returns home.

Ms Scrimshaw was recruited to the post in 2003. She completed a certificate in medicines management for pharmacy technicians in 2006 and believes this has supported her knowledge and enabled her to carry out medicines use reviews more effectively. She has also expanded her role into the following areas:



Most patients find medicines easier to take after taking part in a medicines use review

- Taking part in trials of new compliance aids
- Assessing patients' eligibility for assistance in taking medicines (eg, winged caps, large type directions), without charge, under the Disability Discrimination Act
- Assisting the delivery of DRUM (dispensary review of use of medicines) training to dispensing doctors

Ms Scrimshaw also makes presentations to self-help groups for conditions such as arthritis and Alzheimer's disease. These allow her to provide information on medicines and compliance aids to a large number of patients and answer any questions that they have.

Evaluation of Ms Scrimshaw's service suggests 81 per cent of patients believe they are more confident about taking medicines and find them easier to take after taking part in a medicines use review. A total of 89 per cent of patients said they would recommend the service to others. One patient commented: "It was good to be able to talk to [the medicines management specialist] as hospitals do not really explain about the medicines they are giving you and what they are supposed to do."

Ms Scrimshaw has also received positive feedback from GPs, who have commented: "It is good to feel supported by another service", and have praised the "excellent" level of service that is provided.

Ms Scrimshaw summarised her role by pointing out that while her input to medicines management increases education and compliance, decreases GP visits and hospital admissions and occasionally saves money, most importantly it makes a difference for the patient.

Pilot sites required

The completion of a competency framework for medicines management technicians is drawing closer. Jane Hough, pharmacy clinical services manager at Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust, said the general framework used for pharmacists was being adapted to produce a technician level framework (TLF) for medicines management.

Ms Hough told the conference: "There will be a launch meeting for the TLF on 16 January. The development team is looking for pilot sites to undertake assessments during early spring, with feedback in the autumn."

Any technician or department that is interested in participating in the pilot should e-mail: jane.hough@orh.nhs.uk

The Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK conference, entitled "Spotlight on Specialisms", was held in Leeds on 20 November. **Tess Fenn** is education officer for the association.

Technician-led smoking cessation proves successful

Smokers can be supported to quit at a technician-led smoking cessation clinic, according to Joanne Taylor, community lead pharmacy technician at Wirral Primary Care Trust.

Ms Taylor, who runs the Wirral clinic, explained that, after an initial assessment, patients are encouraged to agree a quitting plan and start taking nicotine replacement therapy. Patients' progress is monitored at follow-up appointments and smoking status is validated with a carbon monoxide test.

Ms Taylor said: "Regular contact with the clinic helps smokers find coping strategies and can provide vouchers for obtaining NRT." Data from smoking cessation clinics is passed to the Department of Health to inform national statistics.

Time to speak out

Technicians must become involved in the consultations that will shape the future of pharmacy, urged Jeremy Holmes, chief executive of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society.

Speaking about the Clarke inquiry into the future role of pharmacy's professional body, Mr Holmes emphasised that full engagement from the pharmacy team will help support the inquiry to provide an independent and objective review of the professional body. The consultation period for the Clarke inquiry ends on 31 January 2008. The new professional body should be fully functional by January 2010.

With regard to the focus that the new body should adopt, Mr Holmes said: "Transformation of the organisation and profession in the best interests of patients is the way forward."

For further details on how to submit your opinion for consideration by the inquiry panel, visit www.theclarkeinquiry.com