



# Mud, glorious mud: the experiences of pharmacist volunteers at Glastonbury

Chris Elmes

Following an article in *The Pharmaceutical Journal* in March 2004 describing pharmacy services at the Glastonbury Festival, over 100 pharmacists showed an interest in working there this year. Dawn Connelly finds out how some of them survived the experience

**W**e will definitely be coming back next year, is the resounding message from pharmacists who braved the mud for five days last June to work as volunteers in the two pharmacies at the Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts.

Last year was the 24th annual Glastonbury Festival. It was attended by 112,500 spectators and 34,000 performers and crew. On site there were two medical centres, two welfare centres and two pharmacies, the Festival Pharmacy and Arena Pharmacy. These were staffed by approximately 500 health

professionals. About 3,000 people were treated by the medical team during the festival. A total of 32 pharmacists and 21 support staff assisted the six-strong management team in running the pharmacy service this year.

Most of the new volunteers had thought about going to the festival before but all were "Glastonbury virgins" and it was the *Journal* article (*PJ*, 20 March 2004, p355) which gave them the impetus to apply. The volunteers were of all ages, came from all over the UK and brought with them a wide range of expertise (see Panel).

Viv Youell was the first person to call Tony Guest, superintendent pharmacist,

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## The volunteers: who they are and where they came from

- ▶ *Viv Youell is a pharmacist who works in the prison service and is based in London. She qualified in 1989. She worked two shifts, one five-hour and one nine-hour shift; both were spent at Festival Pharmacy.*
- ▶ *Janice Tadros is a locum community pharmacist in London and qualified in 1981. She spent one shift at Arena Pharmacy and two shifts at Festival Pharmacy, each shift lasted five or six hours.*
- ▶ *Fiona Wild is a pharmacist in an independent community pharmacy in Lancashire and qualified in 1995. She spent all three of her four- and five-hour shifts at Arena Pharmacy.*
- ▶ *Adam Sutherland, a hospital pharmacist in London, qualified in 2002. He worked two shifts, one five-hour and one nine-hour; both were at Festival Pharmacy.*
- ▶ *Lisa Robins, a community pharmacist working for a major multiple in Cambridgeshire, qualified in 1995. She worked three five-hour shifts, two at Arena Pharmacy and one at Festival Pharmacy.*

Festival Health Ltd, after seeing the article in *The Journal*. She was a little nervous about what she might experience. "I didn't know if I had skills that would be useful in an acute situation. The prison service, where I work normally, is reasonably static in terms of the client group," she said.

Festival Pharmacy was located in the medical unit and dispensed all prescriptions written by medical staff, while Arena Pharmacy was based in the market place and dealt only with over-the-counter medicines.

Expectations of the event were mixed. "I had no idea what I was going to. I imagined it could be anything from messing about in a tent to . . . well, I just didn't know," said Janice Tadros. Fiona Wild says that she, too, had no idea what to expect and little information was given before she arrived. "I took my wellies. That was the only expectation I had," she said. "But I didn't mind that. I just thought that it is a great opportunity. It is something that I wouldn't have done otherwise."

Most of the volunteers worked two or three shifts, each lasting between five and nine hours, which allowed them plenty of time to enjoy the sights and sounds of the festival. There was always at least two pharmacists working at each location.

### Festival Pharmacy

Ms Tadros dispensed a range of drugs during her shifts at Festival Pharmacy. "It was basically the same sort of things that I would dispense anywhere else, only more intense," she explained. She came across a lot of prescriptions for antibiotics to treat a variety of conditions from wounds and abscesses to chest infections and urinary tract infections.

Adam Sutherland commented that salbutamol and beclometasone inhalers were other commonly prescribed items. He thought that the festival formulary was helpful, although there were a few items listed, such as co-proxamol, which did not work well in the festival environment, where alcohol was so freely available.

Toothache and dental abscesses summed up Ms Youell's first shift, and sprained ankles summed up her second. She also witnessed the adverse effects of

magic mushrooms manifested as severe dystonia that required sedation. "A couple of people said they found their shifts boring," Ms Youell commented, but she put this down to the fact that most pharmacists usually have to "run around like headless chickens" and do not have the luxury of time to think and watch what is going on around them.

Ms Tadros usually works in isolation in community pharmacies and she said that she enjoyed working closely with other pharmacists and health care professionals at Festival Pharmacy. "It was really good to be able to bounce ideas about," she explained.

### Arena Pharmacy

One of the top-selling products at Arena Pharmacy was loperamide. "After experiencing the toilet and washing facilities, I wasn't surprised by the high demand for loperamide," Ms Tadros admitted. Other products commonly requested included contact lens solutions, ibuprofen and sore throat remedies. This is not too surprising considering that 750,000 pints of lager and bitter were consumed and shouting and singing could be heard for hours. Compeed, a product that protects and heals blisters, was also a predictable top seller.

Pharmacists at Arena Pharmacy could refer patients to medical staff if necessary. Ms Tadros found that most of the referrals she made were for conjunctivitis — another hazard of less than clean conditions. Tonsillitis was also a common complaint that required referral. Ms Robins referred a number of people to the medical unit to have their wounds dressed.

There was also a high demand for emergency hormonal contraception at the festival. Levonelle was sold over the counter by pharmacists at Arena Pharmacy. "We soon ran out of EHC and then had to refer patients to the medical centre where they could obtain a prescription," said Ms Tadros. Ms Wild explained that even when EHC was available at Arena Pharmacy the cost meant that a lot of people preferred to go and face the queues in the medical centre, where they could then have a private prescription dispensed at Festival

Pharmacy for a flat rate. The most unusual request Ms Wild received at Arena Pharmacy was from a rather inebriated man asking for a pair of trousers!

Ms Robins was expecting to have to deal with problems with over-the-counter drugs open to abuse during her shifts at Arena Pharmacy but found that there was a surprising lack of requests. "Perhaps there were just too many other things freely available," she suggested. However, Nurofen Plus (ibuprofen and codeine) did have to be removed from the shelf at one point due to suspicions of group purchasing. Ms Robins had one request for methadone during her shifts. Methadone is not dispensed at Glastonbury due to police concerns over its storage. However pharmacists can assist people in obtaining a supply from a pharmacy off site. On this occasion, it was not necessary.

### Final thoughts

So, was it a once in a lifetime experience or will the new volunteers be prepared to don their wellies again next year?

"I will absolutely be going back next year — if they'll have me," exclaimed Ms Tadros. "It was great work experience, and to combine this with the festival was fantastic," she commented.

Ms Wild said that she, too, would definitely work at the festival again. "It gave me the opportunity to go to Glastonbury, to experience a completely different environment and to get a different angle on customers," she explained. Ms Robins agreed: "I would definitely go again. There weren't any negative aspects to working there and the nice thing was that I only did three five-hour shifts . . . so I was able to see the bands that I wanted."

"I had a fantastic time. If they ask me I would love to go back and join them," said Mr Sutherland.

The experience was "life changing" for Ms Youell. She said she would love to go back next year. ✎

*This article is based on one published in The Pharmaceutical Journal (10 July 2004, p62).*