

Life as a General Practice Pharmacist

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Who would have ever thought that working as a pharmacist in the beautiful countryside of South Australia, near the Flinders Ranges, with a great team of passionate health professionals including general practitioners (GPs), nurses and allied health professionals would be possible? Where a team approach is taken towards our patients' health care needs - a world where everyone cares for one another and where everyone stops to say hello to you. Where we all make time for one another.

It's wonderful to be able to share my new role with pharmacists around the world through FIP. Four months ago, I started working as a General Practice Pharmacist in the Mid-North of South Australia (SA) through a project that is funded by the Country SA Primary Healthcare Network and the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia to trial pharmacists working in general practice. I work as part of a general practice team who provides care to three rural towns: Jamestown, Orroroo and Peterborough. It's a relatively new role in Australia that is becoming increasingly popular and one that I believe has an important role to play in the future.

My role involves many and varied activities, from:

- Consulting with patients, providing patients with advice and education on their medications, and reconciling their medications;
- Providing support to our GPs through direct drug information queries, screening patients for vaccines, routine blood tests, dosage changes and suggestions; to
- Providing education to GPs and staff, and clinical governance activities; and
- Managing practice medications, ordering medications and looking at storage ideas and suggestions.

I am also able to support our practice nurses with triaging patients, any medication-related queries that they may have and also support the administrative staff. My day may begin with checking emails and messages from GPs for the first half an hour, followed by seeing patients until mid-afternoon, spending some time answering specific medication-related queries, assisting nurses with storing medications, then preparing and giving an education session in the afternoon. Every day is varied, with each day being both interesting and rewarding - a job that I am really enjoying.

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Rural locations in Australia often lack support networks related to health and we struggle to find rural GPs to work away from the cities. Our GPs are under immense pressure and are often working extended hours providing services to our local hospitals, providing emergency services and consulting within general practice. Working as a General Practice Pharmacist relieves some of these pressures by supporting our doctors, saving them time and enabling them to focus on other tasks and spending more time with their patients. I believe it is one answer to assisting with such shortages, and a solution to help assist with improving rural health care services.

Some comments received from GPs, nurses and administrative staff on my role have been:

‘Great to have this service. Great benefit to doctors, nurses, admin and patients.’

‘It’s great to have a pharmacist available who can provide current/best practice information.’

‘It’s great to be able to access a pharmacist and discuss issues with them that a patient may have with their medications.’

I previously worked for 14 years as a community pharmacist at our local pharmacy in Jamestown, a role I loved. I feel that my new role is personally more satisfying and equally beneficial to our patients. I am able to allocate time with patients where needed. If someone needs half an hour, I can spend it with them; or if they require an hour, I can spend it with them. I strongly believe that involvement of pharmacists in general practice will assist to decrease hospital admissions and poor patient outcomes related to poor medication-related management and patient knowledge of medications.

Patients also recognise the benefits of having pharmacists in their GP’s surgery. Some comments received from patients have been:

‘After talking with the pharmacist, I feel much more at ease with my condition.’

‘The time spent with the pharmacist was much longer than the chemist (pharmacy) could allow and more private. Thank you - very helpful.’

‘The practice pharmacist is a great service - please keep it up.’

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Working in general practice has provided the final piece to a lifestyle that I love very much - a great work and family mix. I work at the practice three days a week, provide Residential Medication Management and Home Medication Management Review services one day a week, assist my husband who is a truck driver and farmer with his accounts one day a week, meanwhile spending time with our very special two-year old boy. I am forever grateful to Helen Stone, the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia South Australia and Northern Territory manager, the Country SA Primary Healthcare Network and our GPs who have provided me with this wonderful opportunity. I am enjoying every moment of it and am very excited to be able to share my new experience with you all.

