

Your Guide to **SWeET** **S**trategic **W**orkforce **E**ducation and **T**raining

This edition of the 'Keeping You Informed' bulletin focusses on the role of the **Senior Pharmacy Technician**, a ward based role designed to increase pharmacy presence on the wards whilst releasing more time to nurse.

Head of Pharmacy Services, Martin Shepherd



Over the last few years the number and complexity of medicines that are needed by hospital inpatients has grown significantly. This has heightened the potential for errors occurring, and has highlighted the need for patients and their carers to be given more and better information about the medicines that they receive.

This combination has had a significant impact on ward nurses, who now spend at least 60 per cent of their time preparing and administering medicines. At a time when there has been evidence of some difficulties in recruiting and retaining ward nurses, looking at alternative means of ensuring that patients receive the medicines that they need has become an area of increasing interest in the context of a changing workforce.

One of the ideas that has now come to fruition is the development of a role for pharmacy technicians to support ward nurses in administering medicines. Many hospitals across the country have developed this approach with the aim of releasing nurses to provide other aspects of nursing care, and to improve the quality of medicines management on the ward.

In April 2018, the hospital agreed to the creation of two pilot projects based on the creation of Medicines Administration Technicians that were to be based on Eastwood and Barnes wards.

Senior Pharmacy Technician – Lisa Delahay

“My background has always been in Pharmacy, working at a Boots dispensary for 22 years before moving to aseptics here for six years in Pharmacy production. This change to administering medications to patients is big for me as it not only takes out of a pharmacy setting but I’m doing things that required me to learn new skills and adapt some of my current skills.

“The thinking behind the role is that our inpatient wards are seeing an increasing number of patients who come to us with increasingly complex medicines. Our nurses spend more than half of their time, I think an audit showed up to sixty per cent, on medicines administration; alongside a shortfall in the provision of medicines related information to patients at discharge. This wasn’t ideal for patients or colleagues so we wanted to see if there was an opportunity for pharmacy technicians to help.

“We put together a training programme that would allow me to take a role on Barnes ward providing medicines administration. I worked hard to gain my care certificate which means that I can assist nursing teams with things like the moving and handling of patients, checking blood sugar levels and administer some medicines. I can’t do the more complex tasks such as administer controlled or intravenous drugs but I can do the associated second checks with nurses to administer those together.

“As part of the training I worked with healthcare assistants for six weeks to get up to speed with how the ward works. By carrying out some of these tasks, I got to know how the ward works and who the patients are. It also allowed me to get to know my colleagues on the ward who must have found it difficult as my role meant that their roles were also changing. Nothing like this role had been done at the Royal before; medicine administration was always part of the nursing responsibilities so I was concerned that it would take some time to be accepted.

Senior Pharmacy Technician – Lisa Delahay

“What we have tried to do is use my expertise in medicines management and administration to take some of that responsibility away from the nurses to allow them more time to do the things that only a nurse can do. We handle drugs and medication all of the time so by incorporating that into a new ward-based role it releases more nursing time and I think we’re starting to see the benefits of that.

“My day will normally start at around seven in the morning to ensure my shift is in line with nursing teams so that I can be involved in the handover. I now know which patients I need to see so can plan my morning and prepare the pharmacy cart and follow the ward HCAs who will carry out the obs and set about giving patients their medication. I can monitor medicines to reduce missed or delayed doses, promote the use of our patients’ own medicines and provide medicines counselling during patient admissions. I’ve been doing it now since July 2018, been wonderfully supported by my pharmacy colleagues and the ward matron and really starting to feel part of the team.



“What I enjoy most about the role is the patient contact which I didn’t get when I worked in pharmacy production. You really get a feel for how everything you do impacts on the patients and it can be difficult emotionally to see from that perspective but I feel involved and passionate about the people I’m helping which is great.

We’ve all taken to the role now that it’s had time to bed in and we’ll be assessing its impact. We’ve started to see examples of how some of our nurses are able to spend more time with the patients which is where their skills lie and it has to be a positive thing to see the Trust making more use of the different and unique skills we have on the wards. We still have things to learn and we’re making efforts to visit other hospitals to see how they use similar roles and I know it will continue to evolve but for the moment I’m very much enjoying it and I think it’s of benefit to both patients and colleagues.

Senior Pharmacy Technician – Janice Bradshaw



“The idea came from a commitment to save nursing time and we identified a role that was using a Pharmacy Technician’s skills at ward level within one of the Manchester hospitals. They were very accommodating when we went to take a look at their renal unit and shared their training package with us which was incredibly helpful. We thought that it was a role we could adopt here on the inpatient wards as we were confident that it would fit our aim of saving nursing time by using some very specific pharmacy skills to administer medicine to patients.

“A training package was devised for the technician role, also used for Assistant Practitioners, and recruited Lisa and another position on Eastwood ward to see how it would work in practice. Lisa completed the care certificate and then worked through the training pack to help her to integrate into the Barnes ward team, changing her hours to optimise what we felt would be the best time for her to use her skills to help the nursing team and the patients.

“We’re now collecting information on how long it takes to complete the ward medication rounds to see if Lisa can do it more quickly because she is less likely to be interrupted than a nurse. We know that nurses are more likely to be asked certain questions by both patients and clinical colleagues, questions that Lisa is not as likely to encounter. By following Lisa during her rounds and then doing the same with her nursing colleagues, we can determine where those interruptions occur, what type of interruptions they are and whether Lisa’s round would make a difference to the efficient use of time to make sure that we’re getting the best of use of everybody’s skills.

“We know it’s likely to evolve and have already undertaken visits to see how other hospitals use the role. For example, Lisa now counts all of the controlled drugs on a ward with a nurse; this would previously have taken two nurses to carry out. She can also check that the arrest trolley is intact and ready if needed. It all helps to provide more care for nursing and optimises the varied skill sets that make up a multi-disciplinary ward.”

For More Information Contact

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