



## Devon pharmacist offers prescription for better patient care

Karen Acott, superintendent pharmacist and partner, Wallingbrook Health Centre, Chumleigh, Devon

### INDEPENDENT PHARMACIST PRESCRIBING IN PRIMARY CARE

The Government wants to encourage more pharmacists to take on a prescribing role in addition to their dispensing duties, using their skills to add to what a GP can offer to improve the healthcare patients receive.

Karen Acott is not only a supplementary prescriber, but the first pharmacist to become a partner in a GP practice. She was made superintendent pharmacist and partner at Wallingbrook Health Centre in Chumleigh, Devon, in 2004 and has developed a unique role as a highly respected member of the primary care team.

### RATIONALE BEHIND THE ROLE

“The nearest community pharmacy to the GP practice is 10 miles away and we have a lot of elderly people in our area for whom access to a pharmacy is difficult, so we have a dispensary set up at the surgery. The doctors here thought an independent pharmacist prescriber would be a useful addition to the practice,” says Karen. “The GPs were spending a lot of time on

medicines reviews which didn’t make the best use of their skills and time. It made sense to have a pharmacist on board to do this for them.” When Karen came on board, her independent prescribing skills were a bonus in the role.

### HOW THE PHARMACIST PRESCRIBING SERVICE WORKS

All the patients in the practice who are on repeat medication have a medication review once a year. They are first given blood tests, and once the results are ready they book an appointment with the pharmacist to discuss their medication and whether it needs adjusting in any way. “I use my prescribing skills to look at the medication the patient is on and adjust it if necessary, for example if their blood pressure has increased or their diabetes is not well controlled. I also give the patients a lot of advice about their medicines – many don’t understand why they need to take them regularly or have blood tests and I explain all this to them which helps with concordance,” says Karen.

The appointments last 15 minutes and the pharmacist clinic runs three days a week, with around 44 patients seen during this period. “The doctors still do the more complex medicine reviews such as for cancer patients or mental health patients, but otherwise the doctors will refer any patients with medication queries or problems to me,” explains Karen.

The surgery uses a triage system whereby any patient who has a medication issue is automatically given an appointment with the pharmacist first rather than one of the practice’s doctors.

“In addition, the doctors will often call on me to give advice on medicines queries they have and I also get most of the pain control referrals as this is my specialist area,” says Karen.

Additionally, she runs a weekly diabetes and epilepsy clinic and briefs the doctors on the latest drugs studies and new National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) medication recommendations.



### IS THE SERVICE POPULAR?

“I’ve had very positive feedback from the patients – many are now happy to book an appointment with me instead of the doctor. The doctors in the practice are very encouraging of my role and will steer patients to me with any medication queries they have,” says Karen.

Last year the local media featured the prescribing service offered at the surgery and some of the patients Karen has treated were asked to comment on the service. “They were very complimentary about it, which has given us more good publicity.”

### BREAKING NEW GROUND

“I think pharmacists should be using their specialist skills in a variety of environments and I’d like to see more of them taking steps to qualify as independent prescribers and use these skills,” says Karen.

“I’m often called to give advice to other independent prescribers across the country and it’s good to be seen as representing best practice in a new field. I’m also invited to participate in Government-led focus groups, participating in documenting my role in various Department of Health documents such as the White Paper

for Pharmacy (entitled *Pharmacy in England: building on strengths – delivering the future*), and this is really worthwhile as I’m able to give them a realistic and hands-on view of what pharmacists can contribute to the health service.”

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