

## THE ROLE OF PHARMACISTS IN ASTHMA CARE



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### Background

The role of pharmacy cannot be divorced from the effective management of chronic conditions. Almost all chronic conditions, including asthma, are routinely and increasingly managed with medication<sup>1</sup>. As experts in the management of medicines, pharmacists have an essential and active role to play in managing chronic conditions and ensuring people get the best from their medicines at all times.

The NHS in Wales spends nearly £700 million each year on prescribed medications across Wales. Of this it is estimated that around 66% is spent on medications for managing chronic conditions in both community and hospital settings. As the demand for medication grows in Wales, so the need for effective medicines management becomes ever more important.

With a pharmacy network of over 700 community pharmacies across Wales, pharmacists are highly accessible in our communities, providing support and advice to people with chronic conditions as well as those who are apparently well but may already have or be at risk of developing a chronic condition. The important role of the pharmacist is increasingly being recognised in **preventing illness, minimising health risks, and maximising health gain**.

### Opportunities provided by pharmacists in supporting people with asthma

The traditional role of pharmacy in supplying and dispensing medication has expanded greatly with more opportunities for pharmacists to get more actively involved in clinical care.

There are many vehicles that can be used to more fully integrate pharmacy into asthma care (as well as for other chronic conditions) across Wales. They include the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework, patient group directions (PGDs) and pharmacist prescribing. By using these provisions, planners and policy makers, can enhance the role of pharmacy ensuring the delivery of effective services that are well aligned to local and national priorities.

The key advantages of pharmacy in the delivery of integrated services for improving care of asthma include:

- Medicines Use Reviews and Medicines Use Reviews+ (Using the provisions of the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework to ensure the best use of medicines)
- Therapeutic drug monitoring
- Supplementary and Independent Prescribing – permitting pharmacists to monitor and adjust medication doses and prescribe appropriate medication.
- Provision of opportunistic information and advice on managing asthma in community pharmacy settings
- Supporting self-management
- Signposting/referring to other health and social care professionals as well as local voluntary sector groups who can provide support and advice.

### Examples of good practice in managing asthma

The majority of specific services provided by pharmacists for asthma have been undertaken on an ad hoc and pilot basis. Some examples include:

- Innovative practice was undertaken in partnership between pharmacists and Asthma UK, to identify people whose asthma was less well controlled and offering them a Medicines Use Review (MUR). This review addressed the type of medication being used and inhaler technique. The Results from 200 pharmacies have demonstrated that over half of the people reviewed were using their reliever inhaler too frequently and that following referral to their GP for those with sub-optimal control almost two thirds had changes made to their prescribed treatments.

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- Pharmacies have been involved in identifying people with uncontrolled asthma, undertaking a questionnaire with them and referring them back to their GP or asthma clinic with the results of their questionnaire for review and follow up.
- Pharmacists have been involved in developing clinical management plans and asthma action plans for people with asthma, reviewing and educating on inhaler technique and undertaking regular reviews.

### Further developments for asthma care

While pharmacists in community and hospital settings are already playing a key role in supporting people with asthma, a baseline survey has indicated a high percentage of community pharmacists expressing an interest in specialising in chronic conditions management, including the management of asthma.

An area for further development for Wales may be in increasing the integration of the role of the pharmacist in care planning with GPs and nurses for people living with asthma. This would ensure a more joined up approach where the expertise of the pharmacist in medicines management can be fully utilised for the benefit of patients and health services.

### RPSGB engagement with the Welsh Assembly Government

The RPSGB in Wales is working closely with the Welsh Assembly Government to help ensure that pharmacy is fully integrated into the management of chronic conditions and that the expertise of the pharmacy profession is more fully utilised across Wales. As a key member of the Welsh Assembly Government stakeholder groups addressing chronic conditions management (CCM), the RPSGB continues to provide advice on the role of the pharmacy profession in CCM.

- The importance of pharmacy in managing chronic conditions is highlighted in '**Designed to Improve Health and the Management of Chronic Conditions in Wales: An Integrated Model and Framework for Action**<sup>ii</sup>. As one of the eight 'Foundations for Change', it is acknowledged that pharmacy services must be harnessed to deliver important benefits to people with chronic conditions as well as to the wider health and social care economy across Wales.
- The **CCM Service Improvement Plan 2008-2011**<sup>iii</sup> also highlights that action must be taken to ensure the seamless provision of pharmaceutical care across the whole patient pathway. The plan aims to enhance the contribution of pharmacy through:
  - Health promotion, illness prevention, screening and early intervention in the community
  - Increased public and patient education about medicines
  - Supporting independence and self-care
  - Improved medicines management to substantially reduce emergency medical admissions related to medicines
  - Professional development, skills training and workforce developments
  - Improved IM&T systems allowing for better communication and information exchange across healthcare interfaces
  - Expanding repeat prescribing and enhanced services
  - Playing a key role in local service planning arrangements
  - Workforce developments to fully integrate pharmacy into local services

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<sup>i</sup> N Barber, J Parsons, R Darracott, R Horne: Patient's problems with new medication for chronic conditions; available @ [www.ghc.bmjournals.com](http://www.ghc.bmjournals.com)

<sup>ii</sup> Welsh Assembly Government (2007) Designed to Improve Health and the Management of Chronic Conditions in Wales: An Integrated Model and Framework for Action

<sup>iii</sup> Welsh Assembly Government (2008) Designed to Improve Health and the Management of Chronic Conditions in Wales: Service Improvement Plan 2008 – 2011