

Russel George MS,
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
Senedd Cymru

Consultation: Supporting people with chronic conditions

Dear Russell,

Thank you for this further opportunity to support the committee's work on this important topic.

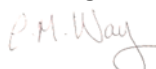
We know that medicines are the most common intervention in the management of chronic conditions. For patients they can be life-prolonging and life-saving. However they can also cause harm and lead to unnecessary wastage if used incorrectly.

As the experts in the safe and effective use of medicines within the health service, pharmacists must play a central role in supporting people with chronic conditions to get the best outcomes from their medicines. Consistent use of pharmacists' expertise will also help reduce adverse reactions to medicines, minimise avoidable harm and un-planned admissions to hospital.

The contribution below goes into greater detail on how pharmacist are already supporting people with chronic conditions and how their skills can be utilised further - touching on some of the broad areas you have highlighted in your introduction to the consultation.

We hope the information is helpful. Please do get back in touch if any further information would be helpful.

Kind regards



Cheryl Way
Chair, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's Welsh Pharmacy Board

Prevention and self-management

The Self Care Forum advocates for an approach that encompasses ‘four pillars of self care’¹. The pillars comprise of lifelong learning, empowerment, information and local and national campaigns.

The table below illustrates how pharmacy teams are well placed to support individuals at each point of this engagement model.

Lifelong learning	Every week thousands of people visit community pharmacies in Wales for medicines and health advice. The often-informal nature of the contact with a pharmacist and the wider team enables them to provide opportunistic healthy living education, advice and support for people at every stage of life.
Empowerment	The accessibility of the community pharmacy network on the high street, supermarkets and rural communities provides a gateway to health and medicines advice from a healthcare professional without the need for an appointment. Pharmacists can offer reassurance and empower people to take greater control of their own health and wellbeing.
Information	<p>As a trusted healthcare profession, pharmacists provide a reliable and confidential source of health and medicines information. The pharmacy team can also ensure that individuals are signposted to trusted resources and groups for further information about their physical and mental health.</p> <p>Self-assessment tools on how to reduce risk could also be used with individuals to assess and understand their relative risk of developing a chronic condition.</p> <p>Obesity and smoking, for example, are linked with many chronic conditions. Pharmacists can advise on reducing risk by providing information on positive lifestyle choices, supporting positive behavioural change, information on self-care and providing services such as smoking cessation programmes.</p>
Local and national campaigns	An essential service that a community pharmacy provides is the promotion of healthy lifestyles and wellbeing. One way this is undertaken is via public health campaigns. Each community pharmacy in Wales is contracted to undertake 6 public health campaigns every year. Multidisciplinary national and local campaigns could provide a real opportunity for consistent messages to be delivered to all individuals.

Timely Detection

When an individual first starts to experience symptoms of ill-health, they may initially attempt to self-manage. People will often seek advice from a community pharmacy and this is an ideal opportunity for the pharmacist to detect early warning signs of what could become a chronic conditions.

Timely detection and referral can make a significant difference to people’s quality of life, particularly at the early stages of a chronic condition such as rheumatoid arthritis and dementia. Pharmacists see people regularly and are able to detect signs and symptoms of some chronic conditions on an opportunistic basis e.g dementia, arthritis and respiratory conditions.

¹ <https://www.selfcareforum.org/2015/03/30/self-care-forum-manifesto/>

However, the current lack of a formal referral process from community pharmacy leads to delays in access to treatment for the patient. Despite being the most accessible health professional group with such regular interaction with patients, when people present at a pharmacy with symptoms of a chronic condition that requires referral, the pharmacist has few options other than suggests they visit their GP. This will be the case even though the pharmacist may have already recognised that the patient would benefit from quick access to another health or social care professional.

The lack of a formalised referral system leads to patients always having to take an extra step themselves before they get the care they need, rather than it being facilitated for them by the health service. Furthermore, if a person does not follow up on their pharmacist's advice to contact their GP, it risks that individual being lost to the health service and not receiving a diagnosis and support they need for a chronic condition.

To streamline referral processes, we recommend that formal referral protocols/pathways should be developed for pharmacy teams to make direct referrals to other services. Their aim should be to remove burden from patients themselves and allow them to move through the health system more rapidly and efficiently. These protocols/pathways should be developed with input from across multidisciplinary team and patients' representatives so that they are tailored to what patients need and expect.

Finally, more opportunities for simple testing for chronic conditions should also be explored as part of preventative approaches to healthcare (e.g. testing blood sugar levels for diabetes or blood pressure measurements to prevent strokes). Timely detection with appropriate information and support and simple lifestyle changes could prevent significant medical interventions and hospital admissions in the longer term.

Treatment

Once an individual has been given a diagnosis of a chronic condition, ongoing support must be provided by an appropriate skilled multidisciplinary team. As part of this approach, pharmacists should take overall responsibility for the medicines management aspect of this care.

When prescribed and used effectively medicines have the potential to significantly improve quality of life and improve outcomes for individuals with a chronic conditions. By focusing on a holistic approach to pharmaceutical care, pharmacists can support individuals to maintain good health and wellbeing and avoid complications of their existing chronic condition, as well as working to prevent the development of further chronic conditions.

Pharmacists across all sectors in Wales are already supporting patients with chronic through various models of care. However, a consistent approach is required.

Such an approach to pharmacy's role in chronic disease management has been identified within the profession's 2030 vision *Pharmacy: Delivering a Healthier Wales*.² The model below illustrates the desired model for each sector of pharmacy to take its appropriate role in supporting people with chronic conditions at every stage:

²

<https://www.rpharms.com/Portals/0/RPS%20document%20library/Open%20access/Policy/Pharmacy%20Vision%20English.pdf?ver=2019-05-21-152234-477>

Community Pharmacy	All patients that have stable, well controlled chronic condition will be monitored and managed in their community pharmacy. This will ensure ease of access for patients to their regular medicines, with appropriate, tailored timescales between consultations depending on current stability of their health condition.
Primary Care	Pharmacy teams at cluster or general practice level, integrated into multidisciplinary models, will provide medicines interventions for patients who are newly diagnosed or who have unstable or worsening chronic condition(s).
Hospital	Only those patients who require urgent, intensive or highly specialist care will require access to specialist pharmacists and their teams within the hospital setting. These specialist pharmacists will also be enabled to input into their patients' care at a local level.

Across all sectors, the growing prescribing capacity with pharmacy will be a key enabler to develop the profession's role in chronic conditions management to grow.

Multimorbidity

The committee is right to identify the need to support patients diagnosed with multiple chronic conditions. Such patients will typically need complex medication regimens with more intensive support from pharmacists. It is recognised that the impact of co-morbidity is profound and multi-faceted. Patients with several chronic conditions typically have poorer quality of life, poorer clinical outcomes, longer hospital stays and more postoperative complications, and are more costly to health services.

Using multiple medicines for multiple conditions can become problematic (polypharmacy) where medications are prescribed inappropriately, or where the intended benefit of the medication is outweighed by the risk. The more medicines an individual is prescribed, the greater the risk of drug interactions and adverse drug reactions, as well as impaired adherence to medication and a reduced quality of life.

As the number of individuals with co-morbidities become more prevalent, the challenges associated with prescribing the right medicines and supporting patients to use them effectively should not be underestimated. This increase in complexity means that prescribers have the challenge of dealing with potential interactions between medicines prescribed for different conditions.

Managing polypharmacy is where the expertise of the pharmacist is essential as part of multidisciplinary approaches to care. The in-depth pharmacology and medicines expertise of the pharmacist is essential when considering the optimal medication regimen for an individual with co-morbidities. Following condition specific guidelines may not always be the most appropriate course of action for the individual. Pharmacists must therefore play a leading role in the optimisation of medication regimens for patients with chronic conditions. This will ensure appropriate use of medicines, stopping inappropriate medicines as well as considering opportunities for lifestyle changes and non-medical therapies.