

Pharmacy Technician

Pharmacy technicians are registered professional members of the pharmacy team who prepare and manage the supply of medicines and give advice to patients and customers.

Case study: Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust

Ciara Hallows and Cat Shepherd work in the secure care services within Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust, which provides care for people who are detained under the Mental Health Act and have had some involvement with the criminal justice system, or have an enduring complex mental illness. Within the service there are around 20 inpatient beds for young people, 30 for women and 200 beds for men, at four sites across Birmingham.

Service users come from all over the West Midlands, with some coming from outside the region. The average length of stay is around two and a half years which allows time for therapeutic relationships to be built and for treatments and therapies to be effective. Service users work towards recovery, which looks different for each person, and the pharmacy service plays a part in that process, through the regular multi-disciplinary team meetings, and preparing and enabling individuals to manage their own medication and thus take steps towards independence and discharge.

Ciara is the Pharmacy Technician Team Manager and line manages three senior pharmacy technicians, one pharmacy technician and two assistant technical officers.

The team is responsible for:

- Safely and efficiently dispensing medication to in-patient wards, community services and coordinating medication for community leave and discharge.
- Accuracy checking: all Pharmacy Technicians who are accuracy checkers have undertaken an annual accreditation which involves checking 1000 items with no errors, a timed assessment, reflective accounts, and an interview.
- Answering and directing queries.
- Medicines reconciliation.

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**It's the best
job in the
world!”**

- Supporting self-medication.
- Each Pharmacy Technician is responsible for a number of wards where they:
 - Check and order stocks for the ward.
 - Order individual service user supplies.
 - Manage clozapine supplies including coordinating blood tests, checking results and ordering supplies.
 - Liaise with wards and teams to ensure leave medication is on the ward in a timely manner.
 - Carry out quarterly audits on safe and secure handling of medicines, recommending actions to the ward manager and monitoring their implementation.
 - Maintaining out of hours cupboards.

Supporting self-medication is an important area of work for the team and where they are able to support individuals to live more independently on discharge. Historically self-medication assessments have been completed by pharmacists, but the team are developing a more 'patient facing' technician role which includes providing education about medication and possible side effects, completing assessments and reviewing prescriptions to ensure regimes are as straight forward as possible and therefore easier to manage. In one example a service user was taking medication at eight different times during the day, and the pharmacy technician was able to help reduce that to twice a day. Building relationships is critical to the role and patient involvement and choice is integral in helping people feel invested in their care and progression.

Ciara (pictured right) openly admits that she fell into pharmacy quite accidentally. She had been to art college and was making wedding dresses but missed the academic side of work. When her partner told her about a job advertised in a private hospital pharmacy, she applied and successfully became a Student Pharmacy Technician. She stayed in that job for four years where she mostly carried out orthopaedic work. She'd always aspired to work in mental health so when the senior pharmacy technician post with Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust was advertised, she applied, working in non-secure services for another four years. After maternity leave in 2008, she successfully applied for a job in Secure Care Services and became the Pharmacy Technician Team Manager with that team four years ago. She attributes part of her career development to having been fortunate in having some very supportive and inspirational managers and colleagues over the years. Her current manager, Jo Deeks, offered her the opportunity to attend multi-disciplinary team meetings for a year to cover a pharmacist maternity leave which allowed her to use her skills and experience in a forum that a technician hadn't attended before which was both challenging and rewarding.



Ciara is passionate about the development of the technician role and feels that now is an exciting time where 'we can take the role in new directions, both clinically and into higher leadership'. In 2017 she co-produced the inaugural Psych Techs event for the College of Mental Health Pharmacy alongside her pharmacist colleague Hannah

Macfarlane, this is a one-day event for mental health pharmacy technicians to share inspirational working.

Cat Shepherd (pictured right) left school after A' Levels and saw an advertisement in the paper for trainee pharmacy technicians in community pharmacy so took it and qualified by distance learning. She loved the patient contact aspect of the job and became Head Technician. She wanted to work in the NHS in either chemotherapy or mental health and was successful in securing a post with Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust at HMP Birmingham. She then moved to Secure Care Services, initially to cover a maternity leave and then a permanent post. She has worked for the trust as a senior pharmacy technician for six years, initially in men's secure care services but since her maternity leave three years ago she has worked in women's and children's secure care services where she has been able to be more involved with developing the pharmacy service. She is the pharmacy lead for reinstating the self-medication scheme and has:



- Reviewed guidelines.
- Written and delivered staff training.
- Liaised with senior service managers and attends meetings.
- Completed self-medication assessments and made recommendations to teams.
- Made recommendations for rationalising medication regimes.

Cat has really enjoyed working closely with the staff and service users as self-medication is an area which really empowers individual service users. The next step is to develop medication education sessions for service users and she's working with them and Ciara to identify what is needed.

Cat and the team were involved in the implementation of electronic prescribing system in Secure Care Services, which is in place now across the whole trust and allows for paperless prescribing for in-patient services. This saves lots of time which can then be used for development work.

Cat says she has learned so much from good managers over her career, including Ciara, and appreciates being part of a team who strive to provide the best possible patient care, while developing the Pharmacy Technician role.

Read more about the role:

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/pharmacy/roles-pharmacy/pharmacy-technician>

Read more about training to become a pharmacy technician:

<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/medicines-optimisation/training-pharmacy-technicians>