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# Valuing pharmacists as members of the eye team

Pharmacists have extensive knowledge about the ever-increasing number of eye medicines available; their input is vital to protect patients and ensure effective treatment.

Pharmacists are valuable members of the eye team. They can support the eye care team to make effective, patient-centred decisions by sharing their extensive knowledge about:

- the range of medicines available locally for eye conditions
- the interactions between different medicines
- how to improve adherence, e.g., by suggesting a change in the type of bottle being used, or a change in formulation (e.g., with a preservative-free product to reduce stinging sensation).

The role of the hospital pharmacist as part of a multidisciplinary team is usually understood and accepted. However, the role of the community pharmacist may not be well understood.

In the community setting, the pharmacy is often seen as simply the location at which patients collect their medication. The community pharmacy is, however, an essential point of contact for primary health care, including primary eye care. Patients come to seek advice about a wide range of conditions and about over-the-counter or prescribed medication.

Community pharmacists play an essential clinical role in assessing the nature of patients' primary concerns (e.g., is it allergic, infective, or acute?) and deciding whether they need to be referred. Pharmacists can also offer support, information, and reassurance to their patients.

## Good working relationships

Effective teamwork between community pharmacists and other members of the eye team is essential to ensure patient safety and improve patient outcomes, so it is therefore important to create opportunities for collaboration and to set up effective communication channels between community pharmacists and the eye team. Here are a few ideas.

### Prescription checking

- Recognise that prescription errors are often picked up by pharmacists, who are specifically trained to do so. Acknowledge that this is in the best interests of both patients and doctors. Acknowledge that this is in the best interests of patients and doctors. Respect pharmacists' role and training.
- Share the eye team's contact details with community pharmacists, so that it is easy and convenient for pharmacists to resolve queries and potential errors.
- When giving patients a prescription to take to the



Every contact between pharmacist and patient is an opportunity to improve patients' eye health. GHANA

pharmacy, it may be helpful to attach a copy of their hospital or discharge notes (containing their diagnosis, the medication they have been prescribed, and the dates of any follow-up appointments). This will make it easier for the pharmacist to detect inconsistencies or prescription errors. (In the UK, patients who leave the hospital receive a 'discharge summary' which is shared with pharmacists via an electronic medical records system; this allows pharmacists to follow up on the prescribing and dispensing of medication for each patient.)

### Referral and feedback

Set up a referral and feedback mechanism between the eye clinic and community pharmacists.

- Ensure pharmacists have up-to-date information about clinic days and times, so patients don't have the expense of a wasted journey.
- Give feedback to pharmacists who refer patients to you. For example, you can thank them for referring the patient, confirm whether or not they were right to refer them, and offer support or guidance to improve future referrals.
- You could be proactive and give all the community pharmacists in the area a set of referral forms with your hospital or clinic details and space for them to add their contact details, the reason for referral, and to indicate whether or not this is an emergency.
- The clinic administrators can also send the patient's discharge information directly to the pharmacist.

### Training

The multidisciplinary eye team does not stop at the hospital door – it extends out to the community. Some ideas for bringing community pharmacists into closer contact with the hospital-based eye team include the following.

- Offer training sessions for community pharmacists and outreach nurses/eye care workers. Offer sessions on basic eye care, specialist sessions, e.g., eye infections or glaucoma care, or practical sessions such as referral guidelines and procedures
- Invite pharmacists to share their knowledge about the latest eye medications or formulations. This is a great opportunity for learning for all members of the

multidisciplinary eye team to learn about the role of community pharmacists/nurses.

### Care for long term eye conditions

- For chronic eye conditions such as glaucoma, the community pharmacist may see the patient more often than the ophthalmologist. Sharing the patient's care plan with the pharmacist can help, as every contact they have with the patient is an opportunity for them to support adherence and safety, and to reinforce key messages.

Pharmacy in eye care is an ever-growing industry, with new drugs and formulations coming onto the market every few months. Pharmacists undergo many years of training, and their input is vital to ensure patient safety and effective treatment. They can advise clinicians about potential interactions, suitability, availability, and alternatives. Therefore, collaborating closely with community pharmacists will help eye care providers to offer effective and safe treatment options in both hospital and community settings.

### Further reading

Waszyk-Nowaczyk M, Guzenda W, Kamasa K, Pawlak K, Bałtruszewicz N, Artyszuk K, Białoszewski A, Merks P. Cooperation between pharmacists and physicians – Whether it was before and is it still ongoing during the pandemic? *J Multidiscip Healthc*. 2021 Aug 7;14:2101-10.

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### CASE STUDY: GHANA



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# Providing eye care education for pharmacists

Community pharmacies are often the first place people will go to for help with an eye condition, so it makes sense to enhance their knowledge of eye care.

Pharmacists play an important role in eye care. Many patients will go to their community pharmacy to seek over-the-counter or self-care medication for eye conditions. Some prescribed systemic medications may also contribute to eye problems (see article on page 14), so there really is a need to have a very close relationship between eye care practitioners and pharmacists.

Community pharmacies are often the first place many patients with eye problems will go to for help, especially in low- and/or middle-income countries, such as Ghana. So it is useful to empower the people who work there with basic knowledge of common eye disorders.

In 2018, I was invited to present at a series of workshops for pharmacists, hosted by Novartis Ghana. We spent time discussing what might bring the patients to pharmacists. These were the most common reasons shared by the pharmacists:

- 1 Red painful eye
- 2 Eye injuries
- 3 Itchy eyes
- 4 Not seeing well, both near and distance
- 5 Glaucoma
- 6 Growths and swellings
- 7 Various childhood conditions.

I discussed the following:

- The normal and abnormal eye
- The signs and symptoms of common eye conditions, the rationale for their management
- The practice limitations of pharmacists.

Pharmacists' role is to provide first aid and then refer, especially for eye injuries. As a rule of thumb, **any patient presenting with pain in the eye should be referred for further investigation immediately.**

### Health promotion

Pharmacists also play an important role in health promotion by providing patient education and counselling. Although pharmacists are not experts in treating eye conditions, they can give useful advice based on patients' presenting symptoms and whether they came to purchase prescription or over-the-counter medicines. Pharmacists can also explain how the medicines should be used.

For example:

- Counsel people with diabetes about the importance of having regular eye checks, so that any early signs of diabetic retinopathy can be detected.
- When refilling eye drop prescriptions for patients with glaucoma, ask them to encourage other family members to get their eyes checked
- Encourage parents to take their children for a sight test once a year

General eye messages to help people avoid vision loss and maintain good eyesight can also be delivered by pharmacists – whether in person or via posters and or leaflets. For example<sup>1</sup>:

- Your eyes are an important part of your health
- Have a comprehensive eye examination at least every two years
- Keep your blood sugar levels within a healthy range
- Know your family eye health history
- Eat right to protect your eyes
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Wear protective eye wear and do not leave children to play unsupervised by an adult
- Quit smoking or never start smoking.

### Reference

- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Tips to Prevent Vision Loss. [www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/risk/tips.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/risk/tips.htm)

### Top tips when treating common eye conditions with over-the-counter medications

- **Avoid prescribing steroid drops if someone has a red, painful eye.** Steroids are prescribed *only* by the ophthalmologist. For example, if the person has a corneal ulcer, steroids can weaken the immune response, which will worsen the infection. (What other reasons might there be?) Topical steroid drops can cause an increase of intraocular pressure and can lead to secondary, steroid-induced glaucoma. Advise the patient to visit the nearest clinic for further management.
- **In case of an injury, never instil or prescribe any eye medication in the affected eye.** Refer immediately. This is an emergency.