

“ASK YOUR PHARMACIST”

By Liz Ponting – Gloucestershire Pharmacist

How many of you are well informed about the free and easily accessible 'health' resource on your doorstep?

I have been qualified as a pharmacist for 35 years, and during this time the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and other health bodies, have tried to promote the pharmacy profession as a health resource for the public to access.

As the current National Health Service (NHS) pressures increase, with long waiting times and a shortage of family doctors the message is stronger than ever. The NHS is now employing pharmacists to work within some doctor's surgeries to support patients with complex, long-term medical conditions. There are also some community pharmacies that offer a minor ailments service and can also support patients who need urgent medical care. Therefore, why not 'ask your pharmacist'?

Every community pharmacy that dispenses prescriptions or sells pharmacy only medicines must have a fully qualified pharmacist on the premises, available to supervise over the counter sales and check the clinical content of prescriptions. This also ensures that an expert is available to offer advice to the general public without an appointment. More recently many pharmacies are open until quite late in the evening providing the opportunity to seek advice during most waking hours. If you call at a particularly busy time you may be asked to wait a few minutes, but generally you will be seen very quickly.

To qualify as a pharmacist today entails a four-year degree course and an additional year of pre-registration training in an "accredited" working environment. The degree covers many topics concerned with how medicines act in/on the body, their side -effects, compatibility with other medicines, appropriate uses, dosages and their manufacture.

Pharmacists are there to help with any concerns or queries about prescribed medicines as well as those that can be purchased over the counter. They have access to many sources of medicine information or patient information leaflets, and in addition can contact other support services such as:

- Drug companies - who provide information around the ingredients (active and non-active excipients) of medicines (e.g. to avoid exposure to know compounds that may cause allergies).
- Hospital based Medicines Information Units - who can help with current hospital policies or information requiring more detailed or specialist resources.
- National Pharmaceutical Association (NPA) - who are extremely useful for helping identify whether unusual items are available on prescription, or with UK equivalents of overseas medicines.

The 'NHS 111 Service' also includes possible referral to a pharmacist as part of their stepped approach to health queries over the phone.

In summary, pharmacists can support patients and their families/carers on all aspects of healthcare and medicines.

This article has attempted to help you get the most out of your pharmacist and it may sound as if I'm boasting and blowing my own trumpet. This is probably because I am. We are a useful resource so please don't be afraid to use us!

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