

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: Thomas James

Thomas qualified as a Pharmacy Technician in 2011 and has worked at Princess Alexandra Hospital since October 2016, managing projects to support electronic prescribing.

After studying politics and sociology, Thomas was working in a retail job and not enjoying it. Via a friend of a friend he heard that a local hospital was recruiting pharmacy assistant technical officers (ATOs) which sounded more interesting than working in a shop. He applied for and got that job and as a result he heard about pharmacy technicians so subsequently went on to train for that role at Stoke on Trent College.

Thomas is one of the two technical leads supporting the management of a project to introduce electronic prescribing across the hospital and completely eliminate paper prescriptions in all parts of the hospital, including the emergency department. The project has been successfully rolled out to all in-patient areas of the trust, including A&E. In most NHS hospitals it's the pharmacy department who audit prescribing and thus are responsible for implementing and managing the system for prescribing, which in this case has meant introducing new software packages and training staff to be able to use them.



The project is divided into two parts – normal in-patient prescribing and chemotherapy where Thomas had previous experience, but in practice the two technical leads work very closely together across the whole project.

The project is almost completed and has enabled the following:

- Analysis of prescribing patterns across the trust, and provision of regular reports for internal and external stakeholders.

- Following on from that, working on a similar package to monitor the prescribing of antibiotics across the trust, to support antimicrobial stewardship.
- Reminder systems in the emergency department, so that nursing staff are alerted when medication is due, and also whether a drug administration needs to be witnessed in the case of controlled drugs or intravenous delivery.

There are other pieces of work associated with this project, including:

- Ongoing training of staff to ensure maximum use of the system.
- Upgrading the e-prescribing system to comply with the falsified medicines directive – an EU wide system to eliminate counterfeit medicines from the supply chain.
- A new dispensing robot system which will check medications against the national medicines verification system (NMVS), to comply with the falsified medicines directive, as it places them on the shelf. Thomas is currently looking at how this could be implemented.

The e-prescribing project requires Thomas to work closely with the information team within the trust who develop the IT packages, but there's a need for clinical skills in interpreting the reports they produce and put them into context.

In terms of impact on services the e-prescribing project has:

- Made cost savings in:
 - The use of paper and associated space to store archived records.
 - Make the process for prescribing drugs more efficient.
 - Keeps the drug record with the patient rather than to and fro to pharmacy, and subsequent risk of getting lost.
- Improved concordance by enabling nursing staff to administer medication at the precise time it's needed for the patient, rather than at the time of a drugs round:
 - And thus improved accuracy of medication and patient care.

For Thomas this job has been a step outside the traditional pharmacy role and has enabled him to develop an understanding of the business side of running a hospital. For him it also shows that pharmacy technicians have the skills and expertise to manage pharmacy projects and that trusts can recruit from a wider talent pool who can bring technical and practical solutions to roles that were previously always unnecessarily earmarked for pharmacists.

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>



The stand-out achievement of this project has been the implementation of e-prescribing across the whole trust, including the Emergency Department, something many trusts have found difficult to achieve due to the complexities of the work streams involved..”