

Introduction of the remote pharmacist role in NHS Shetland

Background

In response to challenges to recruit pharmacists to work in NHS Shetland, a remote pharmacist was recruited.

Impact

There were several examples of positive impact from introducing this role:

- **Improved equity of access:** Remote pharmacists are able to provide an equitable service regardless of where the patient lives. Very rural and remote practices now have access to weekly pharmacist support.
- **Increased continuity of care:** Remote pharmacists are able to offer relational continuity of care, both in terms of staff and patient relationships. Patients said they liked having someone to discuss medications with them.
- **Staff capacity:** By managing appointments via phone or online video call, pharmacists can avoid multiple ferries and car journeys to attend clinics, releasing time to focus on other tasks.
- **Improved recruitment pool:** Offering hybrid or remote work options saw a significant rise in the number of applicants.

Learning

Service level:

- Importance of integrating remote pharmacist into team, through virtual huddles, one-to-one monthly supervision, and ensuring all meetings are hybrid.
- Encourage remote pharmacists to attend in person once per quarter to enable face-to-face contact with the wider multidisciplinary team, GP practices, and patients.
- Offer regular check-ins to monitor wellbeing of remote staff, as working alone may be isolating. Ensure IT systems reflect hybrid working (eg how to print prescriptions when not in person).

Practice level:

- Ensure protocols are in place for GP practices to access pharmacists remotely and know how to best communicate with them.
- Agree with practices how supervision, escalation processes or urgent care are handled locally.
- For more rural practices, explore how remote pharmacists can collaborate with in-person team members such as pharmacy technicians when home visits are required.

Challenges

While the remote pharmacist role has provided great opportunities for development in NHS Shetland, there are also challenges. For example, where patients receive telephone consultations, they need to be able to accurately name complex medications rather than refer to them by visual markers (eg colour or shape).

Also, while the pharmacy team has developed ways of working and is continuing to learn from previous experiences of hiring remote pharmacists, there is still a need for in-person pharmacotherapy support.

Further information

For more information on Shetland's remote pharmacist role, please visit Healthcare Improvement Scotland's Primary Care Pharmacotherapy Showcase videos:

[Personal reflections on the strengths and challenges of working remotely](#)

[How the remote pharmacist role has been integrated into NHS Shetland primary care](#)

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