

Developing the pharmacy support worker role in Edinburgh City health and social care partnership

Background

To support the expansion of the pharmacotherapy service in south-east Edinburgh, the team introduced pharmacy support workers (PSW), a new role within NHS Lothian. The role was developed to ensure pharmacotherapy tasks were delivered by the most appropriate professional. By having the appropriate skill mix within the team, pharmacotherapy workflow could be directed to the right person.

Activity

Recruitment

Lead pharmacists began by networking with other health boards that had already implemented the PSW role. These conversations offered valuable insights into how PSWs could be effectively integrated into their own service. The role generated significant interest, and the team successfully recruited three candidates with prior pharmacy experience.

Role development

The time of the PSW was divided between working across multiple practices, supporting operational processes in the hub, and undertaking a pharmacy services modern apprenticeship.

To ensure the role could help release technician capacity, lead pharmacists gathered feedback from pharmacy technicians. This feedback informed the creation of a workplan that clearly defined tasks which could be safely delegated to PSWs without requiring oversight. The workplan included the following:

- serial prescription administration eg processing letters and phoning patients regarding changes to their prescription ordering
- monthly Vision/EMIS searches and pharmacy Readcode recording
- cost saving projects such as ScriptSwitch® reviews and reviewing high-cost prescription/medicines, and
- non-clinical medication reviews eg removing items no longer required or appropriate from repeat prescriptions and aligning dates for remaining items on repeat prescriptions.

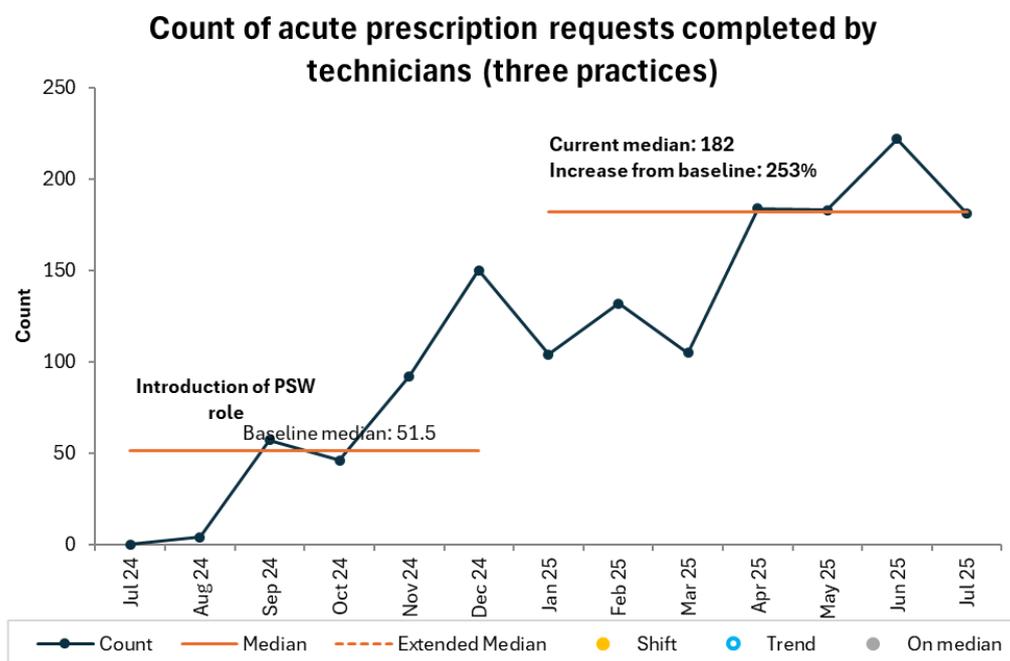
Impact

Right person, right task

The addition of the PSW role has been an important factor in ensuring the right person is doing the right task in the pharmacotherapy team. With the PSWs taking on more non-clinical tasks, pharmacy technicians could dedicate more time to more complex tasks such as acute prescription requests.

Figure 1 demonstrates since the introduction of the PSW role, the count of acute prescription requests completed by pharmacy technicians for three practices has increased by 253%. With technicians taking on more advanced tasks, pharmacists have been able to focus on more level two and three tasks. Since the introduction of the PSW role, additional specialist pharmacist-led clinics and polypharmacy clinics have been established in the south-east Edinburgh locality.

Figure 1: Count of acute prescription requests completed by pharmacy technicians in three practices from July 2024 to July 2025.



Development of pharmacy skills

As the team recruited PSW candidates with prior pharmacy experience (including knowledge of healthcare systems, medicines and consulting with patients), these individuals could contribute effectively from the outset. This approach combined with training plans and opportunities to shadow technicians and pharmacists effectively equipped PSWs with the following key skills:

- understanding of prescription legalities, controlled drugs protocols, and clinical and accuracy checking procedures
- familiarity with drug ordering, supply chains, and pricing
- basic consultation skills
- awareness of medication uses, high-risk drugs, and audit processes, and
- knowledge of compliance aids (eg, dosette boxes, medication administration record charts).

Staff satisfaction and role development

One year on from the introduction of the PSW role, the lead pharmacist held a review of the role with the PSWs to gather feedback. The feedback was viewed positively with one PSW describing how they *'enjoyed how the role has evolved'*. The PSWs described their value as:

- being part of an approachable and supportive team
- working across multiple practices
- gaining practical, experiential learning
- access to development opportunities
- shadowing pharmacy technicians, and
- supporting pharmacists during polypharmacy reviews and care home visits.

During the review, the team also identified areas where improvements could be made to the role, such as:

- Vision search training
- clear communication of PSW roles and responsibilities to practices, and
- additional standard operating procedures for certain tasks.

Next steps

The PSW role has been a stepping stone for career progression. To date, all three PSWs have enrolled in the local pre-registration pharmacy technician course, demonstrating the role can act as a pipeline to develop pharmacy technicians and retain staff within the team.

The pharmacotherapy team aims to upskill practice administrative teams by providing training on non-clinical pharmacotherapy tasks and signposting to Pharmacy First.

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