

Transcript

Elspeth Boxall

Hello, and welcome to the next in our series of the PSDS Pharmacy podcasts. We are still discussing the work of the National Pharmacy Workforce Forum, and today we'll be hearing about the work of the Pharmacy Technician and Pharmacy Support Worker work streams and in that format, I am delighted to be joined by Hazel Jamieson and Lisa Dunn, who have both led on this work for the National Pharmacy Workstream Forum and they have done that in their capacities as Hazel is the National Pharmacy Technician Group Scotland chair, and Lisa is the East Region lead for the National Pharmacy Technician Group in Scotland. So, in a great place just to talk about that work for us.

So thank you both very, very much for joining us and talking us through today. So I'll start with yourself, Hazel. I think if you could just talk to us a bit about what led to the creation of this, what these work streams for the pharmacy technician work and the pharmacy support worker work streams. How do they contribute to the wider ambitions of the National Pharmacy Workforce Forum?

Hazel Jamieson

Thanks, Elspeth. That's a really good question. So I guess the creation of this is a kind of real recognition that pharmacy technicians and pharmacy support staff and pharmacists all have equally important roles within pharmacy. So we can't just look at one role in isolation and equally, we can't just look at one sector in isolation. So this ambition has to be across the whole of the workforce in each and every sector. So they're all interdependent in delivering that kind of safe, effective, and person-centered kind of medicines care.

So I guess the forum has set out a clear direction to ensure that patients receive the right care at the right time, in the right place, and delivered by the right person. And so, as I've said, to achieve this, we need to develop every part of the workforce. So pharmacy technicians already kind of lead on medicines supply chain, they lead on governance, they lead on quality improvement, but they've not had that same opportunity everywhere. It's really kind of patchy up and down the country. So we need to kind of provide that equity of opportunity for pharmacy technicians, and that includes giving them the underpinning knowledge for the roles that they're in now. But also looking at where they can expand into, so those expanded kind of clinical roles, looking at PGD delivery, supervision in community pharmacy, and becoming that accountable professional in aseptic services.

So there's been a lot of change there as well in terms of legislation. And I suppose pharmacy support staff are also central to that transformation, and we can develop our pharmacy support staff to manage workflows across the supply chain and also develop their accuracy-checking skills as well. So the focus is on clear roles, development pathways, good governance, and we need to provide that assurance to the public that we are competent. And so these work streams that the National Pharmacy Workforce Forum has set out are these, are what makes the forum's ambitions deliverable.

Elspeth Boxall

That's excellent, Hazel. You've really, you know, you've really set the scene here, you know. That understanding that we really need to expand the whole workforce together. Nothing can be done in isolation. I think that's really important for people to understand. So thank you for explaining that so clearly. I'll go to you now, Lisa, just to expand a bit on that. What would you say the core aims and priorities of the pharmacy technician and support worker work streams are at this stage?

Lisa Dunn

Sure. Thanks, Elspeth, and thanks very much for having us along to speak today about the work streams. So it's probably helpful to break them down a bit into the four specific commissions that have a pharmacy technician and a pharmacy support worker focus. So the first one that involves us all, including the pharmacist, is the Transforming Roles papers, and that's a shared vision for future roles for the whole pharmacy team. And its aim is to describe how each staff group can contribute to evolving models of care across all the sectors and trying to make use of everybody's best skills and expertise. So the paper sets out opportunities for role development. It identifies enablers and barriers to transformation.

So what do we need to do to get to where we want to be? And provides recommendations to support the planning of the future workforce, and that includes education and service design as well. But importantly, the work is centred on ensuring that patients can access the right pharmacy team member, as Hazel was just saying, so making sure that patients are seeing the right person from pharmacy, and that hopefully supports safer and better person-centered care.

Commission 2 is around about exploring a sustainable pharmacy technician trainee pipeline. So before we've had centralised funding programs that have been paused for the moment. So the priority here is to better understand the current training capacity and find out what's needed to create that sustainable and scalable pipeline of future pharmacy technicians. And that includes recruitment to training programs, it includes educational capacity, it includes supervision, so do we have the right work-based assessor infrastructure there to support that, and ensures equitable access to training opportunities across the sectors. And also like Hazel said before, it shouldn't matter where you work in the country for that as well. So making sure that whether you're in community pharmacy hospital or primary care and GP practice that everybody's got access to things like the technical apprenticeship, and the funding that supports that, whether that be in the salaries for the trainees, but, but ultimately the kind of training programme and the infrastructure behind that can be funded through the technical apprenticeship.

And then you've got the pharmacy technician and pharmacy support worker career pathways, which are commissions three and four. So the pharmacy technician one is looking to develop a clear national career pathway from entry into the profession up to expert levels of practice, and the key areas of focus include post-registration development. So up until now, we've not had a clear structure for post-registration development, so we want to do that. And at the same time, we want that to be assessed

through portfolios and competency frameworks, similar to what the pharmacists have got. Recognition of what advanced practice could look like for pharmacy technicians. We want to investigate and explore that, including leadership opportunities and progression across all the four pillars. And we want to ensure that the governance is robust there. So we need to be clear about what people are competent to do.

But it's not just about career progression, it's about creating a service that's safe and that patients and public have confidence and assurance in. And then also for pharmacy support workers, the focus there is on, again, creating a clear development and progression opportunity. We're already seeing the pharmacy support worker role expand across all sectors into the final accuracy checking of prescriptions, taking medication histories, etc. So we just want to identify consistent knowledge, skills, and behaviours required at different levels to improve access to education and training and support progression into senior support staff roles. And where there's desires from individuals, kind of create that pipeline into the pharmacy technician career pathway if that's what people want to do. And as well, supported support worker workforce, that's essential to pharmacy services and plays a key role in positive patient experiences as well. So that's kinda a view of the four commissions and what the aims and priorities are there.

Elsbeth Boxall

That's a really helpful way to break it down, Lisa. Thank you for explaining that because I think it is really helpful to understand the different ways that you're looking at this and the four different commissions, and obviously having that shared vision in the Transforming Roles paper, again, takes us back to the fact that this is a whole workforce development. And then really interesting to hear about how you're looking at the pipeline for training and development for both the pharmacy technicians and the support workers. And I think that is, as you said, is going to be able to offer that public assurance, which is so important. So thank you for explaining that.

And Hazel, I think we've really set the scene here about what you're trying to achieve. Can you talk to us a bit about what progress you've made so far with these work streams?

Hazel Jamieson

Yes. So progress so far. So for commissions three and four, that is about delivering that kind of pathway, that clear pathway for pharmacy technicians and pharmacy support staff. So, the pathways have been drafted, and been in draft for quite some time. They were kind of ready to go a couple of years ago, but we decided to stop the bus because we really needed the vision. We needed the Transforming Roles piece to kind of come forward and set the scene and make sure that the pathways were aligned with the service need and the vision for Scotland.

So, as we are writing these papers, we are having to go back to the pathways and tweak them because things have moved on so much in the last couple of years with the, you know, the new legislation around PGD delivery, around that accountable aseptic professional and community pharmacy supervision as well. So we're constantly having to go back, and also, Lisa and I are part of the writing group for the Transforming Roles

papers, and it's actually been a real privilege to sit in that group, but we are developing our thinking as well.

The whole writing group, as we're chatting kind of things through and discussing, we're developing our thinking around what pharmacy technicians and support staff, you know, will be doing. So making lots of progress there. So like I said, the pathways are in draft. Paper one is, I think, with the printer. So that's a 'set the scene' paper, and that's something that Lisa and I and the National Pharmacy Technician Group Scotland have contributed to. And then we have drafted the next set of papers for pharmacy support staff and pharmacy technicians.

So they are just getting kicked about by the writing group at the minute before they go out to.. or they go out for further comment and feedback from the SIGs, from the sector working groups, from, you know other NPTGS members, etc. And then they'll go up to NPWAG, which is the National Pharmacy Workforce Action Group, before hopefully finally going up to the forum. So, we anticipate that when these papers are ratified, then at the same time we'll ratify the development pathways as well. And then that will go into kind of implementation phase. So that is the, the progress we've made on commissions three and four. And Lisa, I don't know if you maybe want to say a little bit about your survey- [Yeah] ... for commission two?

Lisa Dunn

Yeah, absolutely. So, we're talking about commission two being that PT/PT pipeline. So what we want to do is get a flavour of what's happening currently within the sectors and each of the... everywhere, actually, with regards to development of training and education of the pre-registration pharmacy technicians. So we've created a survey that asks questions around about what good looks like for people. It also asks about what access programmes or what training programmes and funding sources people are already accessing, what challenges or barriers there are to those kind of things. But also what are the examples of really good practice, so that we can share that knowledge across, across the country so that everybody's got access to the same, the same level of training.

The programmes are established. We've already got the initial education and training diploma for pharmacy technicians is there, and we're delivering that, but it's about making sure that that's accessible to our colleagues in community pharmacy and across the managed sector and making sure, that; that's consistent for everybody. So that survey will ask questions about that. But it'll also come out after the Transforming Roles paper, the first paper, which sets the vision and principles. And that's been quite deliberate because we want employers and education and training providers to start thinking about what that means and whether that changes the landscape for work, for building the workforce.

So the survey will come out to community pharmacy and managed sector employers and people that are involved in education and training just to kind of ask them as to what good looks like and what they think that they'll need to be able to deliver those programmes across the country.

Elsbeth Boxall

Yeah, that's really interesting from both of you there. I think what I'm hearing there is you're really responding to a change in landscape and adjusting your thinking to everything else that's going on around you, which is so important, and I think you're absolutely right. I think, you know having that survey coming out and finding out what, what people think the best that we can do is here and also think about what resources we need is so important. So that's fantastic. Thank you. It really does sound like you're making huge progress.

So I think you've probably both touched on this a little bit, but maybe we can explore it in a bit more detail is, Lisa, what do you think the kind of main challenges are around about the technician and support worker workforce? What are the challenges that you're trying to address with these work streams?

Lisa Dunn

So you're right, we probably have touched on them a little bit. So some of the challenges that we've identified include the variation in access to training and development opportunities, the lack of a nationally recognised career progression pathway for both pharmacy technicians and pharmacy support workers, and the difficulties that, that means we're having with recruitment and retention in some sectors, and just that inconsistent recognition of future progression for pharmacy technicians. So there are development opportunities out there.

There's lots of pharmacy technicians and support staff working in expanded roles and doing lots of different interesting and exciting things. So we want to make, make those opportunities accessible for as, as many people as possible, and we recognise that that depends on the levels of services that are delivered locally. However, it'll be good to share what the... what the opportunities are and where people can develop into if that's what they want to do. With pharmacy technicians specifically, we've currently got access to the vocational training foundation framework for pharmacy technicians delivered by PSD Scotland. But beyond that, we don't have anything for our kind of experienced, more senior pharmacy technicians that have, that have been in the profession for a number of years.

The foundation framework will predominantly focus on people. Currently, it's up to three years post-registration, but we're hoping to reduce that to 18 months. But it's that kind of post-registration development that we really want to, to nail down and communicate what, what the opportunities are out to everybody. So we want to do that. We want to investigate different framework options that are out there.

So there's already lots of work going on across all the different healthcare professions with different frameworks. So we want to see what will, what will suit the needs of pharmacy technicians and identify the one that best fits both the needs for career progression, but also the needs for the services that we're going to be delivering to patients. And that fits with defining levels of scope of practice and also the defining what the roles are for pharmacy technicians and pharmacy support workers. We would really,

really like to be able to describe that better, especially for our patients and the public. So what's the difference between pharmacist, a pharmacy technician, and a pharmacy support worker, and who can I go to for my specific needs that I've got if I'm a patient? And then demand is probably another key challenge.

Patients are living longer. They've got more complex needs, and alongside that, they're using more complex medication regimes. So making the best use of the pharmacy team as a whole to try and deliver that service to patients is another thing that we're hoping that the work streams address as well.

Elsbeth Boxall

Yeah, I think you've described a lot of really important points there, Lisa, you know, around about... Yeah, absolutely. If there's variation across the country, that's really a vital thing to address, and obviously, you know round about this gap in education for more advanced post-registration technicians, that, if you can get that in place, then that will make the whole career pathway more attractive and hopefully help your recruitment and retention, which is so important, and absolutely, absolutely hits home around that describing the roles for the public.

There's often so much confusion, isn't there, around the different roles and what we can all offer, which is, you know, even more important, as you said, with the demand on, on the pharmacy team in general with the complex medications that we're dealing with. So- Absolutely. I think you've described certainly you know challenges, but also potential solutions.

And going back to you, Hazel, maybe you can just kind of expand a bit again on that and what is your vision for the role of pharmacy technicians and pharmacy support workers in the long term, just through all this work that you have done?

Hazel Jamieson

Yeah. So we have talked about the development pathway, and the development pathway for both roles of staff will be based around the four pillars of practice. And so that's going to be really important to develop that well-rounded and robust kind of workforce, especially at the moment. You know, we're really lacking in leadership and research. That's our kind of two pillars, I would say, that we're really weak in.

So we want to develop those, and research especially will give us that evidence-informed kind of practice, and we'll be able to kind of look at the impact that we're having on patient outcomes as pharmacy technicians and as support staff, and can then measure that, and that will then inform our kind of education needs. So we really need to get into that. But the pathway will also kind of provide us with progression that will develop us horizontally or vertically. So there's no kind of push for people to go onto promoted posts. You must move on. Absolutely not. It's about people being able to deliver good services with good practice, underpinned by knowledge in their current roles, but also given the opportunities for the future as well. And that'll give us that kind of public confidence by having those kind of pathways. But what does the future look like for pharmacy

technicians and support workers? Well, I suppose, do you know, in my... Gosh, how long have I been a pharmacy technician now?

Over 20 years. 27 years or something like that. The roles have changed massively, and we are no longer a kind of peripheral voice around the edges of, you know "We'll need to ask a pharmacy technician this question." It's actually become really central and really key to pharmacy services, along with our pharmacist colleagues as well. So we're all recognised as kind of equal, and that will continue, I think, to develop over the next sort of 10 years or so. Roles will be based around competencies.

We've spoken about that quite a lot today. Rather than a list of tasks that we can do. So we're moving away from that and looking at competency based roles. I think pharmacy technicians will absolutely continue to lead in the medicine supply chain space. That is key. They will start to lead in aseptic services. As I've said, they'll deliver under PGD. We'll kind of expand that. I think in Scotland at the moment, we've got them delivering flu vaccines, but we need to start to kind of tease that out and look at, you know, other aspects that they can deliver under PGD. And there's also AI and digital to consider in this space as well. That's a huge kind of piece of work, and I think pharmacy technicians and support staff really need to get to grips with that. That is absolutely somewhere that they can lead on in the future. And I think, obviously, support workers will gain kind of clearer recognition, progression and contribution to workflow and that kind of real quality of work.

So as I've said, we're no longer on the peripheral and we're kind of really key to, to service redesign and delivery now, and we want to kind of build upon that going forward. So exciting times, I think, ahead. Yeah.

Elsbeth Boxall

That is, is so heartening to hear you describe that, Hazel, because I've probably been in pharmacy about that length of time as well and can absolutely agree with you that the roles have changed massively and are continuing to grow. You know, it's such a growth and really amazing to hear the vision that you have and, as you said, you know, all the digital and AI impacts and how the pharmacy technician and support worker workforce can really lead on some of that. So absolutely brilliant. Very exciting times, as you said.

So you know we've really heard a lot about the work that you guys have done, and I think it's, it's absolutely brilliant. I guess, Lisa, just to give people a bit of assurance, can you kind of describe how the pharmacy technicians and support workers from all sectors of, of pharmacy have been represented and heard in this work?

Lisa Dunn

Yeah, absolutely. So, like Hazel was saying, pharmacy technicians and support workers have,... are no longer on the periphery of some of, even the initial discussions. So right from the outset of the forum and of the advisory group, pharmacy technician and support worker representation was sought straight from the start. So that's been good to have that. But like we've already also described, Hazel and I are both part of the National

Pharmacy Technician Group Scotland, and that's got a reach across the country and across all the sectors as well. So we keep the, the groups updated on the commissions and the work streams, and we've... there's always an invitation for the pharmacy technicians and support workers to be included and involved in those work streams or commissions however they want to be. So we regularly consult and provide updates.

We've had stakeholder engagement groups based on the sector. So what... when the vision paper has been written, we've consulted on everybody to get them part of the discussions as to, as to what they see the vision looking like. And also, we have, like we say, we've got the surveys that'll be going out once the paper's been established. So hopefully that captures a breadth of experience from different geographical areas and different sectors, and different levels of experience and career stages as well.

So whether you're right at the start of your career or whether you're experienced. And by bringing together those different perspectives, we hopefully are identifying both the kinda challenges and the opportunities, and sharing our recommendations back up to the forum as well. So that's hopefully how we're... we're managing to make sure everybody's heard and represented.

Elsbeth Boxall

Yeah. That's that is really interesting. And I think you're right. You know, you really need to get that depth of, of understanding across the whole stages of careers, because you'll have people who are just starting out, and they're going to be in this service for, you know a long time, and then it's really helpful to let them shape their future really. I guess the next question I was going to ask is, you've probably touched on it a bit there, Lisa, already.

But Hazel, what kind of opportunities would you say exist for pharmacy technicians and support workers to start to get involved, really get involved in this if they haven't already, and share their experiences with you and their ideas?

Hazel Jamieson

Yeah, absolutely. So please get involved if you, if you are able to. So the National Pharmacy Workforce Forum, they have a kind of communication kind of plan. And with that, there are going to be lots of engagement events. Once the first paper is published, we're going to roll out engagement events.

There's going to be webinars, so there'll be lots of opportunities for you to get involved at your local health board level, and kind of discuss it with your staff. There'll be people delivering these engagement events to teams. There's obviously the information up on Turas, which hopefully you'll have access to, listen to this wonderful podcast. And as Lisa touched on, we have our kind of National Pharmacy Technician Group Scotland, but we also have the regional groups.

Now, the regional groups, I would absolutely encourage you to kind of seek out your member for that. Go and speak to them, get involved, go along. You're welcome as a pharmacy technician, as pharmacy support staff. You know, just turn up, go to the

meeting, listen in, ask questions. That's where all this information will be coming to as well, and that's your opportunity to kind of feedback on some of this. And that will kind of be relayed back to the national group as well. Also look out for these kind of surveys and questionnaires that are coming out. That's your chance as well to get involved. And just to say, when we originally drafted our development pathways, we went out and did a couple of national surveys.

So the first one got a very high response rate, and the second one wasn't too far behind as well. And so people had a chance then to chat about these development pathways and what they thought about them, and overwhelmingly, the feedback was so positive on the pathway. So that's given us hope that people will be, you know, really pleased with what's coming down the line. Also, PTET as well, so that's the Pharmacy Technician and Education Training group. And so your E&T lead for your board will kind of have links into that. So that's another good place to go and have that conversation. So yeah, just a plea: get involved, contribute, we'd really love to hear what you think and take on board your views.

Elspeth Boxall

That's really encouraging, Hazel, and it's, just, like it's such an exciting time for the profession. So definitely take that opportunity to make sure your voice is heard. So yeah, we're just going to round up now really and sort of take maybe some key messages from you that you would like. If people remember nothing else, what, what key messages would you like them to remember from today? I'll go to you, Lisa, for that first.

Lisa Dunn

Perfect. No, well, I think the first key message hopefully that's coming through is that pharmacy technicians and our pharmacy support staff are essential to the future pharmacy services and the delivery of patient care. So that's the first thing.

These work streams are about creating opportunities, about improving recognition and supporting professional development, and ensuring the workforce is equipped. So that's hopefully coming through strongly as well. But it's not simply just about the role expansion, it's about kind of building that sustainable workforce with the right skills, structures, and support to meet the needs of the patients and healthcare services.

So, like, this is a really good opportunity to to shape the future of what that looks like. It's a really, really exciting time to be a pharmacy technician or a pharmacy support worker. I feel as if I've been saying that for a number of years right enough because the roles are changing so fast. But it is, it's a really good time to kind of get involved, and let's work together to shape what that future looks like. And the commissions are providing a bit of a structure to help us to do that in a in a clear direction.

Elspeth Boxall

That's absolutely amazing. Hazel, would you like to add anything at all?

Hazel Jamieson

I think Lisa really summed that up well, and I think it's about those interdependencies. It's about the development of the whole team, and it's also about kind of patient safety, sustainability, professional confidence and growth, and that public assurance as well.

Elsbeth Boxall

Yeah, absolutely brilliant. Thank you so much. You've really, you know. described this all so well, and it just does feel like a very exciting time for the profession, so thank you for taking the time to explain this to us, and I hope that you have some more people getting involved thanks to this.

But we will link the Turas resources that we referred to just in the podcast notes so people can go and have a little bit look for a bit more detail. There's lots of ... I know there's lots of contact information in there about how people can get involved as well.

So yeah, just finally to say a huge thank you to both yourself, Hazel, and Lisa, for coming along and taking the time to explain this to us. And thank you for all your work that you have done on this with the National Workforce Forum. So thank you. Thank you all very much. Thank you.

Hazel Jamieson

Thank you very much for having us. Yeah.

Lisa Dunn

Thank you. Indeed. Thank you.