

Transcript

Elsbeth Boxall

Hello, and welcome to the next series of our PSDS pharmacy podcasts. In this new series, we're going to discuss the work of the National Pharmacy Workforce Forum and I'm delighted to be joined today by Alison Strath, our Chief Pharmaceutical Officer for Scotland, and Scott Garden, Director of Pharmacy for NHS Lothian, who jointly chair this Forum. And today we're going to explain a bit about why the Pharmacy Workforce Forum was established and talk about some of its main priorities. So thank you very much, both of you, Alison and Scott, for joining us today. We're just going to launch straight into the questions. So, Alison, I'll go to you first. Can you describe to us what prompted the creation of the National Pharmacy Workforce Forum?

Alison Strath

Thanks. When I became Chief Pharmaceutical Officer, the pharmacy workforce was, and it remains, my number one priority. Our workforce is our greatest asset, and I wanted to ensure that we had a way of involving all the pharmacy sectors, pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, pharmacy support workers, employees and locums, as well as community pharmacy contractors and health board representatives, as well as other stakeholders, because we can learn so much from their experience, and to co-produce a vision for how we transform pharmacy roles.

And that truly integrated approach is important because we don't.... we exist in an ecosystem, and if we pinch one part of it, then we feel the pain in another. So by coming together and really thinking about how we work together and actually what, what... how we play to the greatest skills of our workforce was one of the real reasons why I wanted to, to establish the forum and, and draw on the experiences of colleagues in the service, in particular to help us drive the change we want to see.

Elsbeth Boxall

That's brilliant, Alison. Thank you very much. That's a great summary and a great introduction to the work of the forum. So, I'll go to you now, Scott, and can you then describe for us what the main goals of the National Pharmacy Work Forums are going to be? What are you aiming to achieve?

Scott Garden

Yeah, sure. Thanks. So I think the main goal of the forum is really to enable Scotland's pharmacy workforce to fulfill its potential in improving population health. And so we're bringing together workforce planning, education, service design into a single kind of 'Once for Scotland' approach.

So having everything kind of aligned rather than fragmented and in silos. And there's probably sort of three big ambitions behind that. So we've got sort of transforming roles. You know, so pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, support staff can all work at the top of their competence. And particularly with more clinical front-facing, patient-facing roles, we

want to try and create, you know, clear development pathways, so structured progression across our workforce, credentialing sort of at the heart of that, and people can see pathways, you know, in their career more easily.

And then I suppose all of that's geared to that longer workforce sustainability. The way we deliver care now and in the future, we know we have to change in line with policy direction and delivering care closer to home, as we know.

But so it's about us in pharmacy trying to get the right care, the right place, but with the right person, the right professional, across the whole of that... the pharmacy workforce and in an integrated way with the multidisciplinary team as well. So lots of, lots of ambitions, several goals within that. But yeah, it's an exciting time.

Elsbeth Boxall

Thank you, Scott. That is really interesting. So you've really set the scene, both of you, and it's obviously such an important piece of work that we all do need to buy into, and it's going to benefit us all if we do. So I guess going back to you, Alison, can you maybe give people a bit of an insight into the progress so far? Has there been any sort of early wins that you would like to talk about?

Alison Strath

Yes. Do you know... Actually bringing people together in the first instance has been a great step, and the way that people have worked together across...across the forum, I think, has been fantastic and that includes, you know, colleagues from other stakeholder groups.

I'm really delighted with the progress we have made collectively. And actually, not just the Pharmacy Workforce Forum, but the advisory group, which is the real engine room driving the outputs and really the forum is kind of taking a helicopter view of that. So... and I think one of the things we've tried to do is really ensure that we have been truly...truly inclusive in what we've been seeking to achieve.

The initial work to identify what work we wanted to commission has been collaborative, and I think we've now made really good progress in each of those commissioned areas. We'll shortly be publishing an overarching Transforming Pharmacy Roles paper, and that's going to describe our aim to develop a modern, skilled and outcome-based pharmacy workforce across the NHS, both in terms of the managed service and community pharmacy services. And this aligns with some of the work that's happening in other healthcare professional groups as well.

So we've got transforming role programmes for medicine, for nursing, midwifery, and allied health professionals. And I guess the important thing about thinking about how we both consider it within our own professions, but also thinking about it across the other groups, is that we want this to work in a multidisciplinary way because many of us work in multidisciplinary teams in practice.

But importantly, we also want to think about how we expand traditional roles for pharmacists, for pharmacy technicians, and for pharmacy support workers. So that transforming roles paper that's going to come out shortly will be, I think, what you might call our North Star.

It's going to set that kind of overall direction. And then we'll follow that with individual papers, looking in a bit more detail for pharmacists, for pharmacy technicians, and for pharmacy support workers. And they'll come... probably come out in a staged way, so that in fact we continue to think about and iterate this in a way that shows that we are working... working collectively together. And I think these papers will be really important because they will define what we need our workforce to be doing, both now and in the future.

And Scott's right, it's an evolving issue. We're into a new government with a five-year mandate who will have their own ideas about how they want to see services being transformed. But by understanding what our workforce can contribute, we can then think about what the educational needs we have to underpin that. And from that, the numbers of individuals fall into place. Sometimes workforce planning, we do it the wrong way around.

We think about the numbers first, when actually we need to think about what is it people will be doing, and then how do we make sure we've got that educational component there and what does that mean by way of the numbers of individuals we need to do the various roles. And I think importantly, just to say, and we haven't probably gone into this in any great detail, but there'll be something around how digital and how artificial intelligence and other things that come along may influence and drive some of our, our kind of ways of working. So it's important that this stays live and real because it will change and iterate over time.

Elsbeth Boxall

I think you've really given us quite a visual there of how things are going to progress and how they have actually already. You've really made some big progress. So it's fantastic to understand that. I think probably what everyone is always concerned about is the challenges that our workforce face. So what are the main challenges that you think that the National Pharmacy Workforce Forum will address?

Scott Garden

Yeah, thanks, I mean... So the challenges, in many ways, are significant but very familiar, I think, across the system. So one of the biggest, from my perspective, is the gap between demand and capacity. So we're seeing those rising levels of long-term conditions, the aging population, increasing complexity in medicines use and the current workforce model really can't keep pace with that. You know?

So if we keep doing the same things, that gap between demand and capacity is going to feel bigger than ever. And then alongside that, there's probably a few other key issues that we need to think about carefully. So the workforce supply, so have we got enough of the

different roles, and is the training capacity aligned to future need? So that's, that's one key element. I think a second is probably the variation in roles and practice. So we see a lot of variation across the system at the moment, some of that will be warranted, of course, and some of it is unwarranted.

So people aren't always working at the top of their competence, and that is often down to inconsistent service delivery models. And it can be complex with the multidisciplinary aspects of that, so we really need to think about that challenge and how we address it. I do think we've got some clarity around career pathways, but I think that could be clearer, and as I said earlier, you know, we can... if people can map their career in a more deliberate way, I think that would be helpful.

Because that does have an impact on recruitment and retention, and you know that stability that comes if you can, if you have those clear career pathways. And then probably the last bit would be that kind of misalignment that we can have between education and service delivery. So particularly as roles become more clinically focussed and prescribing focussed, we need to really think about getting that alignment right, and as I said, that training capacity.

But for me, there's a really important shift that we're trying to make is moving away from that task-based working to outcome-based care. So for example, you know, pharmacists can focus more on clinical activity, that direct patient-facing activity, and the wider team can take on those other aspects that are equally as important, those patient-focused activities, whether it's medicines management, for example, it's really key that we have that and we're using the whole pharmacy team effectively. So for me, it's about redesigning the workforce to be fit for the future, not, as I said, just maintaining the current model. Thanks.

Elsbeth Boxall

So that's absolutely excellent, Scott, and it really does kind of very nicely lead on to the next part that I was going to ask Alison about. And you have already alluded to this, Scott, and you know we want to use the whole pharmacy team, and we want to ensure there's consistency in how we're working and give people the right education to provide the service outcomes that we need.

So I guess, that is incredibly clear, but Alison, building on that, you know in the long-term, what changes are the pharmacy workforce going to see as a result of the work that you are doing now in the Forum?

Alison Strath

I think in the short to medium term, in some ways, describing what... Or aligning with what Scott said, you know we'll have a workforce across both the managed and community pharmacy services that maximises the full contribution of the wider pharmacy workforce to support safer and more effective outcome-based care. And this will be underpinned, you know, with clear development pathways for pharmacists, for pharmacy technicians, and for pharmacy support staff. And there also needs to be robust assurance mechanisms

built into that too as we take on those wider roles, I think, in terms of patient care, in particular, as Scott's referred to, in that kind of prescribing space.

So there's something for me around from our potential pharmacy students through to those who graduate into early careers and into later careers, having that really clear pathway and we'll need to think about that, because I think we probably have a better vision right now for what that looks like in the managed sector, and probably less so currently in community pharmacy. And that's an area that I think we need to give some thought to sooner rather than later.

But there's also something for me about how we, all of us collectively as pharmacists, think about our role in terms of supporting the development of the pharmacy workforce. So I quite like the quote that says, "We rise by lifting others." And so there's something for me about how each and every one of us thinks about not just our own kind of development pathway, but how we support the development of our future pharmacists.

So our role in terms of experiential learning and thinking about foundation year training and how we support people through that process because these are important aspects, and I think sometimes as pharmacists we're a little bit... maybe a little bit more risk-averse around allowing our, kind of future pharmacists when they're in that training period to take on roles and to really kind of allow them to start to contextualise their learning sooner.

So there's something around unwrapping some of that and some of the work we're doing in the commissions around experiential learning and foundation year training, I think will help us establish that. But it's also, I guess, about how we think across the different pharmacy professions, both pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and our pharmacy support staff, and how we think about that approach across all three groups. And I'm also thoughtful, and Scott's kind of talked a bit about this earlier as well, but we are seeing more pharmacists wanting to have more of a portfolio career structure.

So they might work across different sectors of pharmacy. So again, thinking about how we can develop our approach to this in terms of being able to support that way of working. So we don't have a crystal ball to say what things will look like in 10 or 20 years' time in terms of the health service, but I think we can certainly do an awful lot of that foundation work now to think about from now to the next five years, and potentially 10 years, to start to kind of really... to really think about our pharmacy workforce requirements and as Scott said, that bit about capacity and demand and how we manage that.

Elsbeth Boxall

So I think that's really interesting, and I think you already alluded to how inclusive this work is. I guess, thinking about how you're ensuring that there's representation from all sectors, I think both yourself, Alison, and Scott have already mentioned that there is representation from managed care, community pharmacy, education, pharmacists, technicians, all parts of the team. But how can you really offer assurance that in the forum that you have involved everyone in the pharmacy team in this work?

Scott Garden

Yeah. Thanks. So, the pleasing thing to start off with, I suppose, is that there's a lot of interest in being around the National Pharmacy Workforce Forum and of course, we've got two sort of key subgroups in the forum with the advisory group and also the data group, you know,? and I would very much say that both those subgroups are the engine room, you know, that allows us to make decisions within the forum and have the right degree of scrutiny.

But we're very deliberate about making sure we have the right representation around all the tables. But in terms of the forum, so in there we've got, obviously, NHS board representation, got community pharmacy representation, we've had education providers, universities, colleges, Scottish government, of course, and our professional bodies as well.

So both the GPhC as the regulator and, of course, now the Royal College of Pharmacy. And...But we've kind of gone a bit further than that because obviously the workforce forum is a key element of this in steering the work. But we've also got the commissions themselves, and across those seven commissions, that we've got, that's where a lot of the work is being done and taken forward.

So, we have ensured that we've got the right representation around those groups and, of course, quite a varied representation and a wide group of people that are involved in that. And then, I suppose from there, we're also engaging directly with the wider workforce through the commissions themselves and, of course, what comes out of the forum.

So sharing updates through professional networks, national platforms like Turas, encouraging feedback from staff at all levels. And I know as we've been looking at the transforming roles work and development pathways, we've had surveys that have been going out into the system, as well as direct engagement to try and understand the view from the wider staff group across the system and then a little bit of testing, of course, of proposals to make sure they work in some of the real-world settings. So that, again, helps with getting the input at the right level as we shape the work.

So it's not just representation at leadership level, it's about ensuring the entire workforce has a voice in shaping what comes next. And I think for Alison and I as co-chairs of the forum, that's been something that we've held at the centre of this work and really encouraged, you know, from the beginning.

Elsbeth Boxall

So it sounds like that's been a real priority for you then. It's had a real wide reach, and it's very reassuring for people, I think. I was going to ask, how do people get involved and share their views, but I think you've probably already covered that. And, you know, you really have been reaching out to people through lots of different ways and made it as easy for people to get involved as possible. So I won't ask again about that because I think we've probably covered it.

So really just now thinking about rounding off our conversation, for everyone who's listening, it will be people from all different parts of the pharmacy workforce. Do you have a sort of take-home message that you want to leave people with about the importance of what the National Pharmacy Workforce Forum is doing?

Alison Strath

I suppose from my perspective, I think, and it kind of builds on what Scott's just recently said about that...about really being engaging and there's something around, don't be afraid to ask a question that you might think is a silly question because sometimes these... these can be really helpful in ensuring that we've got our messaging right around what we're trying to achieve. But this is definitely something for me around get involved, you know, get engaged and think about it because it's sometimes really easy to criticise what's happening around you, and it's quite challenging sometimes to step out and think about changing it.

But, you know, by engaging and bringing your ideas forward, you know, it allows a much richer kind of conversation, and more thought given, I guess, to, you know, how we make sure that this is truly collaborative and we've kind of really listened and heard what people are saying and we can think about how we shape then our kind of plans as we go forward. It's a great opportunity, you know.

Sometimes these things happen in an ivory tower, and it feels like you can't engage or influence it. But I think genuinely what Scott and I are trying to achieve, and I know each of the kind of commission leads are looking to how they reach out. But genuinely, we want people to come forward and to work with us and to work through the representative bodies that they have around the table and really help drive and shape this because it's a great opportunity, I think, for us to really get that workforce... that workforce programme right. And importantly, you know, we should all be influencing that because we are all part of the workforce. [...]

Scott Garden

Yeah, maybe just to build on that, Alison, because I think, you know, for me, it's a really exciting moment for pharmacy in Scotland. So we've got a clear national direction to transform roles, you know, strengthen career pathways, try and enable everyone in the pharmacy team to make their fullest contribution to care.

But it's not...this is not just about workforce planning, it's about improving outcomes for patients, you know, tackling those health inequalities that we know we've got significant issues with in Scotland, and ensuring pharmacy plays a central role in that kind of modern healthcare offer. But it's important to say, I suppose, that from my perspective, it's a collective effort.

So the success of this programme of work depends on engagement from the whole workforce. So sharing experiences, shaping the solutions, helping us to get this right as a collective.

So I guess my message, my key message, I think to take away, would be stay engaged, be part of the conversation, and see this as an opportunity to shape the future of your profession. Thanks.

Alison Strath

And you know what, Scott? What's good for patients is good for the profession. So actually, that whole person-centred, patient-centred approach is really important. I think if we build this around what we as pharmacy professionals can bring to improving patient care, that will be good for the professions in themselves.

Elsbeth Boxall

I think that is a really good take-home message. So thank you both, and I really do appreciate you taking your time to talk us through that and it's been an incredibly useful introduction to anyone who wanted a greater understanding of what the Pharmacy Workforce Forum was about and what a really unique opportunity it is for us as a profession, and how important it is that we all get involved.

As always, we will have links to resources in our podcast bio, which will give people another bit more information about how to get involved.

And thank you both for being so open and encouraging to everyone and explaining, taking the time to explain what the workforce can do for us as a profession moving forward. Thank you.