

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol](#) ar [anghydraddoldebau iechyd meddwl](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care Committee](#) consultation on [mental health inequalities](#)

MHI 76

Ymateb gan: | Response from: Welsh Pharmaceutical Committee

Russel George MS,
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
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The Health and Social Care Committee inquiry into mental health inequalities

Dear Russell,

The Welsh Pharmaceutical Committee (WPhC) is pleased to be able to provide a response to this inquiry. The Welsh Pharmaceutical Committee is the statutory advisory committee that advises the Welsh Government on matters relating to pharmacy and the pharmaceutical profession.

We all know that the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects has placed a considerable strain on the population's mental health and wellbeing. There are a number of cohorts within society who are and will continue to be disproportionately affected by mental health unless concerted action is taken across a number of policy areas. This was the case before the pandemic, but COVID-19 has reinforced this inequality.

There are of course a number of challenges facing the Welsh Government, the NHS and partners as we emerge out of the pandemic. However, supporting and caring for the population's mental health and tackling health inequality must be high priority areas. This inquiry is therefore particularly important and timely.

The response below consists of two sections:

1. A discussion around pharmacy's contribution in mental health care & tackling inequities and how their expert skills, knowledge and accessibility can be better utilised.
2. An exploration of the current barriers and enablers that need to be in place to fully harness the skills of the pharmacy team in field of mental health.

1. Pharmacy's contribution to extending mental health Care & tackling inequities

Early Identification of a decline in mental health & wellbeing

The network of more than 700 community pharmacies helps to buck the trend of the inverse care law. It ensures that the people of Wales have access to healthcare and advice within their localities wherever they live.

Community pharmacy staff will also typically reflect the social and ethnic backgrounds of the community they serve. This means they are ideally placed and accessible to individuals who otherwise are less likely to access other NHS services.

Community pharmacy teams have a high level of interaction with their patients and regularly identify early signs of mental health decline. This can be through simply identifying small changes in a person's behaviour or appearance or through opportune discussions when people are seeking other services or purchasing medicines.

Signposting patients to support

As trusted healthcare professionals, pharmacists provide a reliable and confidential source of health and medicines information. The pharmacy team can also ensure that individuals are signposted to trusted resources and groups for further information about their mental health. Pharmacists can advise on reducing risk by providing information on positive lifestyle choices, supporting positive behavioural change, information on self-care and providing services such as smoking cessation programmes.

Specialist Mental Health pharmacy services

There are significant inequalities in provision of mental health pharmacy services across Wales. Some Health Boards have relatively large and more established mental health pharmacy teams while others don't have the same level of provision. However, more investment in mental health pharmacy teams is required across Wales as would build capacity and an opportunity to address service gaps and improve the standards of prescribing and monitoring of psychotropic medication.

We believe that the people of Wales would benefit from a more established network of specialist mental health pharmacists working within community mental health teams (CMHTs) as well as other community teams such as perinatal teams.

An increase in mental health primary care pharmacist posts would help to facilitate a more integrated service between sectors, supporting the transfer of care between secondary and primary care services. These specialist pharmacists could also help support community pharmacy colleagues who identify patients who require more support and referral.

We would encourage Wales to adopt a similar approach to the strategy currently being rolled out by NHS England to transform community mental health provision

with funding and education for specialist mental health pharmacists within community mental health teams

Ensuring safe and effective use of medicines

Medicines are a central component in the care of many mental health patients. When prescribed and used appropriately they can help reduce the symptoms that patients experience, as well as helping them better cope with those symptoms.

There are many examples across Wales of mental health pharmacists utilising their independent prescribing skills, working autonomously in clinics, providing specialist support for patients, which is helping to address gaps in medical staffing. This role should be encouraged and further developed.

Many of the medicines used to treat mental health problems are associated with health risks. As the experts in medicines and their use, pharmacists can ensure people get the best outcomes from their medicines, reduce adverse events, minimise avoidable harm and un-planned admissions to hospital. This ensures resources are used more efficiently to deliver the standard and level of care that people with mental health conditions deserve.

Providing leadership in and assuring the best use of medicines in mental health are the core roles of the specialist mental health pharmacist. Every mental health team should have access to specialist mental health pharmacists as a member of their multidisciplinary teams, whether based in community teams, mental health hospital wards or acute hospitals.

It is also important to remember that many people with mental health conditions may be taking medicines both for their mental health conditions and often for other long-term conditions. Pharmacists, can take a holistic approach to all the medicines a person may be taking, including

- Optimising the use of medicines.
- Supporting patients to understand their medicines.
- Ensuring that the patient is fully involved in decisions about their care.

2. Barriers and enablers to maximize pharmacy's contribution to mental health care

Direct referral pathways

Assessing the nature and severity of any symptoms of mental health problems is a critical step for the pharmacist before deciding on appropriate action. If the symptoms presented are mild the appropriate action may be to simply provide advice on positive behavioural change, lifestyle choices and self-care.

Referral to local wellbeing services, mental health specialist teams or social prescribing pathways are important actions that pharmacists can take. However, at

present, pharmacists' role in signposting and referral is typically informal and relies upon individual pharmacists, their knowledge of local services and personal relationships with local GPs and mental health teams.

Communication of diagnosis and prescribed medicines

Safe and Effective Use of Medicines Communication between healthcare professionals in different settings is crucial to reduce the risk of errors and ensure continuity of care. It is vital that all professionals inputting into the patient's care are aware of the diagnosis and suggested care pathway to provide the best care and advice for patients.

Pharmacists should have full read and write access to up to date patient health records to improve patient care and patient safety. Information is key to delivering more effective pharmaceutical care to patients, improving medicines adherence and reducing the medicine related errors which contribute to unplanned admissions to hospital.

It is also well documented that transitions of care (e.g. from hospital to the person's own home) can lead to unintended medication discrepancies. The Community Pharmacy Discharge Medicines Review Service is well established in Wales and is proven to be effective in reducing medications discrepancies and errors at discharge and should be further utilised for people with a mental health condition.

Training

Pharmacists and their teams need the knowledge, skills and confidence to effectively manage the challenges of mental health and the ongoing consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Protected learning time is essential to be in place for all pharmacists so that they have the time to refresh their skills in light of the pandemic and further embed into the multidisciplinary health team.

There must a co-ordinated approach of psychological first aid training and mental health first aid training to all pharmacists and their staff. This should include the principles of providing support to people/carers, as well as advice on the management of high-risk situations e.g. self-harm and suicide prevention.

Your sincerely

The Welsh Pharmaceutical committee