

*How To Survive  
Your First Year As  
A Pharmacist*



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Journals Of A Young Pharmacist*

# CONTENTS

Introduction

Background

Chapter One ..... First Impression

Chapter Two ..... Do Your Job

Chapter Three..... Dealing With Stress

12 Lessons Learnt As a Newly Qualified Pharmacist

# INTRODUCTION

The journey to become a qualified pharmacist in United Kingdom is highly challenging: you made it through 4 years in university, an additional year of Pre-Registration training and the final exam, well done for conquering the challenge!

Are you ready to assume the role of a responsible pharmacist? Are you ready to analyse situations critically and make firm decisions? How would you get through the long duties and responsibilities of a responsible pharmacist?

Do not get overwhelmed, you are not alone on this journey;

*This eBook will provide you with the basic information you will need and a lot more to transit into the world of Pharmacy, it aims to highlight the key points in community pharmacy practice and to provide support for the day to day activities in a community pharmacy.*

# BACKGROUND

When I qualified in August 2015, I started full-time work immediately as a relief pharmacist, being a relief pharmacist meant I was able to visit and work in different stores daily which was very informative; each store had a unique interpretation on the company's 'Standard Operating Procedures'. It allowed me to quickly build up and establish my work processes. I was able to identify good practices to incorporate into my routine and bad habits to stay away from.

After 2 months as a relief pharmacist, I was offered a store-base position in a pharmacy branch attached to a medical centre. This store pushed me to be the best I can be and taught me most of the lessons I will be sharing with you.

During my time at the medical centre I was asked a very powerful question. A question I wished I was asked at the beginning of my career. A question I believe has kept me going till today.

I was asked,

*“What type of pharmacist will you like to be?”*

Now that's a very motivational question, this question got me thinking hard and long for awhile.

I leave you with with the question: *What type of Pharmacists will you like to be ?* Your answer to this question will help you to establish significant standards and set goals for yourself and your career.

# CHAPTER ONE

## FIRST IMPRESSION

As the saying goes “*you only have 7 seconds to make a great first impression*” this is certainly valid in a community pharmacy. Here is how to use your 7 seconds. *Use it wisely*

- Attendance: It's extremely important and professional to be on time, being late means you are in a rush and therefore tensed which will impact on productivity
- Look the part: Be professional and smartly dressed at all times, it helps to keep the persona (even when deep down you know you lack the experience).
- Composure: A disoriented pharmacist is like a ticking time bomb and no one will like to work with such pharmacist. Being composed is the first key in making a killer impression
- Confidence: Be confident and introduce yourself, have a firm handshake and smile, ask where to set up and do so promptly.
- Communication: Being able to communicate effectively makes your day a lot easier, hence why pharmacy professional standard requires you to communicate effectively in English.

The two **DON'TS** of communication.

- I. Do not be afraid to ask questions or to be asked questions; you need to create an environment where people can freely teach and be taught.
- II. Do not be afraid to speak out and delegate where needed; the pharmacy team are composed of highly knowledgeable members make use of them.

Note: *The pharmacy team provide feedback to the area manager as well as the rota coordinator, you want positive results as this comes in handy during performance review and appraisals.*

# CHAPTER TWO

## DO YOUR JOB

### ***Essential Services***

Dispensing a prescription is the backbone of community pharmacy, ensure you take reasonable time to check the prescription. See my blog post on ["It's All In The Detail"](#) for more understanding of a standard NHS prescription.

*Be Accurate, Efficient and Safe....*

In order to carry out your duties as a responsible pharmacist, I would advise you to carry along a familiar useful resource (BNF?); you are more likely to find solutions quickly using your personal BNF than the copy provided by the store. Whilst studying for pre-registration exam, you would have prepared notes covering useful values such as Blood Pressure ranges and Glucose Levels, it will be handy to carry along a condensed version of these notes with you for easy reference. Find below a guide checklist I used every morning as a newly qualified pharmacist.

Check List	Tick
Smartcard	
Useful Resource	
Pen	
Diary or Note Pad	
RP Notice	
Bottle of Water	

## ***Advanced Services***

There are varieties of services offered in a community pharmacy; they differ depending on the location and the commissioning body, I will focus on the major service offered in almost every community pharmacy Medicine Use Review (MUR).

There is a big push on hitting the 400 MUR target before the financial year runs out, don't be carried away thereby forgetting the true meaning of MUR.

Here are some tips to help you kick-start an MUR.

- **GREETINGS:** It is very easy to forget to say hello. *“Hello Sir/ Ma’am, how are you doing today”*
- **INTRODUCE:** Introduce yourself, explain the service and gain written consent. Follow the pre populated form, (**caution:** pay attention to the conversation to avoid asking questions that has already been answered by the patient). At the end, acknowledge the patient for the time spent by saying *“Thank you for your time Sir/ma’am - do have a nice day”*

Every MUR is different, so here are common problems that may arise and how it could be handled.

- i. **COMPLIANCE:** Patients will report not remembering to take their medication. First tip will be to advise the patient on building a routine, this allows them to associate their medication with a tasks; making it more likely to remember. Second tip, advise them to have their medicine bag on the bedside table or kitchen counter, the bag visibility will thereby improve adherence.
- ii. **UNCONTROLLED PAIN:** Patients may report aches and pains, if the patient has no other underlying conditions, a TENS machine could be suitable, for non-medicinal pain

relief. You could also make a recommendation to their GP for non-traditional pain killers such as gabapentin, pregabalin etc.).

- iii. **LIFESTYLE ADVICE:** You do not have to be a nutritionist to talk about diet or a certified gym instructor to talk about exercise, the basic knowledge from university goes a long way, minor tweaks in lifestyle could make a significant difference in the long run.

# CHAPTER THREE

## DEALING WITH STRESS

Pharmacy could sometimes be overwhelming, there will be busy days which will lead to stressful evenings; you need to find a routine that helps you to relax and unwind. Here are four simple steps I follow and “*All Things Are Made New*”

- i. **TALK:** My mouth is like a vent, whoosh... I need to let it off my chest, usually to two or three people **\*\*kidding\*\***. Seriously though I find talking very therapeutic, it's like a detox. I have a complete cleanse of my mind. Yep it's that deep.
- ii. **HOT SHOWER:** The hot steam and the force of water on my shoulders relieves all tension. I personally use it as a mini massager (after standing for 9 hours 25 minutes to be exact, I'm allowed to think all I want). I wash away all anger and enjoy the calming effect, the mind and body is now clean.
- iii. **FOOD:** I am a big eater, I love food and even after a big portion I will still have a pudding (always room for sweets). I'm also team '*cook at home*' however after a long day, I can't deal with cooking, I switch to team '*takeaway*' nothing wrong being part of two teams.
- iv. **WATCH:** Like many others out there my '*Happy Place*' is in front of a screen. I have no clue about the actors but I totally fall in love with the character they play, I can analyse specific details; their hand gestures down to the way they smile. Just totally zone out into this fairy tale and not think about a single worry in my life. I find pleasure in that. It's simple for me I watch a movie, I move to my '*Happy Place*'

***After 12 months as a qualified pharmacist; here are the lessons so far...***

1. ***Do Not Be Cocky:*** My first week in, I tried to outsmart the slow computers and order Methadone over the phone. It didn't cross my mind to order methadone as the brand Physeptone Oops. This error took me the whole week to set straight!!!
2. ***Time Management Skills:*** I work a 10-hour shift daily; it sounds like I'm at work the whole day, but trust me it doesn't feel that way in a busy store; time goes by quickly, after one or two Medicine Use Review - it is time to go home. I had to learn to prioritise and work fast.
3. ***Complete a Task:*** In a community pharmacy, every service offered has a bunch of paperwork to follow and having too much paperwork can be overwhelming and untidy. I used to save my paperwork for the end of the day, then I realised I was creating a chore and I sometimes missed off a Controlled-Drug Register entry.
4. ***Be Firm:*** Being firm meant I was not easily manipulated. It is very easy to break the law in Pharmacy and my license is all I have. It is my greatest achievement so far. I ensure every day I work within the laws.
5. ***People Skills:*** Working in the public sector, I have the opportunity to meet a diverse cohort. I had to quickly learn to communicate effectively, be respectful even when I am not being respected and be polite even in the most traumatic situations.
6. ***Controlled-Drug Cupboards:*** These cabinets "at least the ones where I work" have the worst constructions. They have curved edges and hidden compartments. I could spend over an hour trying to find the tiny yellow-white Diamorphine box while carrying out a balance check.
7. ***Be Updated:*** Everyone looks up to the pharmacists for answers, I subscribe to pharmaceutical journal and others alike to keep me informed. My sister always says you can't know it all but you need to know the right resources for answers.

8. **Rewarding Job:** I am not a World-Class Surgeon or a Guru of Clinical Knowledge but my empathy and minor ailments knowledge are enough. I make an impact in my local community and my role is appreciated.

9. **Do Not Look Back:** Unless it's life threatening or unexplainable I no longer call stores I previously worked in. Yesterday is past am moving forward. Why should I create the avenue for people to have a go at me, (the newly qualified clueless pharmacist that was slow in checking 😊).

10. **Be Ready:** I never knew to be a store-base pharmacist required extreme dedication. I was tested emotionally, mentally and physically. I learnt the hard way.

11. **Speak Out:** I used to think if I ask for help, I will come across as weak, "far from the truth". No one cares if I am weak and even if they do they have no power over my life.

12. **God's Grace:** How can I explain the 'voice' that tells me to track my steps back because I made an error. People call it 'gut instincts', which it is probably but who gave me those 'gut instincts'? I will be lost but for God's Grace...

Being a pharmacist is a great achievement. Enjoy it!

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