Consultation skills for pharmacy Practice framework launched

Pharmacy, alongside the whole of the NHS, is committed to putting patients at the centre of their own healthcare, enabling them to share decisions and make informed choices about their own health. Effective consultations with patients lie at the heart of delivering patient-centred care. Health Education England (HEE) has launched a new framework to help pharmacy professionals to improve their skills in carrying out consultations with patients and in delivering public health messages. The framework, developed by HEE, the Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education (CPPE) and key stakeholders across the profession, represents a national programme of change in pharmacy and will apply to more than 60,000 pharmacy professionals across England. This includes pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and pre-registration trainee pharmacists across a number of sectors such as hospitals, community pharmacies, primary care, GP practices, care homes, secure environments and the armed forces. It will also impact on Universities and Colleges who are training the next generation of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

The framework, which has been endorsed by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and the Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK, has been structured around the following six questions:

1. Why are consultation and public health skills important for all pharmacy professionals?
2. How do I know what standard is expected of me?
3. How do I know how effective my consultation skills are now?
4. How do I improve my performance?
5. How can I check my learning and development?
6. How do I continue to develop my performance?

The key components are

- a set of Practice Standards for consultation skills in pharmacy, which outline the competencies that pharmacy professionals need to achieve in order to conduct consultations and public health interventions effectively;
- a learning pathway, which individual pharmacy professionals can follow to develop the consultation skills they need. To coincide with the launch, a CPPE distance learning pack will be mailed to all pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in England;
- a range of training formats, for example, face-to-face learning, e-learning and printed workbooks. A variety of resources is available for learners, as well as for those who want to deliver learning, such as employers and local training organisations. Those working through the pathway will be encouraged to collect feedback on their consultation skills from their employers and their peers. Specially designed patient feedback forms are available for collecting feedback from patients and customers about medicines-related and public health consultations;
- an assessment framework which encourages pharmacy professionals to work through a self-assessment process using a structured and validated self-assessment tool to identify their learning needs. There is also an online assessment which uses videoed consultations that pharmacy professionals can access to check their learning and development.

The framework has been well received by the pharmacy community, Delyth Higman James, Senior Lecturer and Programme Director, MSc in Pharmacy Clinical Practice (Community & Primary Care), Cardiff School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, said: "The pharmacy profession has shown over the years that we have excellent communication skills when dealing with patients. However, good consultation skills require more than this in order to improve patient safety and to be at the heart of patient-centred care. This is an exciting and much needed initiative to make sure that effective consultation skills are adopted across all pharmacy professionals and not limited to pockets of good practice."
Nina Barnett, Consultant Pharmacist, Care of Older People, said: “We want every patient to have access to the information they want about their medicines, supported by a pharmacist who addresses their beliefs and concerns about medicines, as well as practical issues. The work of this group is pivotal in achieving our aim.”

Sneha Varia, Pharmacy Professional Development Specialist, London Pharmacy Education & Training, NHS, said: “Providing a framework that facilitates the shift in balance of responsibility to the patient and encourages the provision of targeted support according to their needs helps ensure patients have ownership of decisions made.”

Harriet Lewis, Regional Partnership Manager (North), Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) said: “The use of the framework will be invaluable to improve the skills of pharmacists and those having detailed conversations with patients to ensure they are able to fully engage with the patient, understand the patient’s thoughts and concerns about their medicines and condition and to advise and support accordingly. By working in partnership with the Pharmaceutical Industry pharmacists can take their rightful place as being the most accessible healthcare profession to give expert advice on medicines and support patients to understand the benefits that their medicines can give.”

Christopher Cutts, Professor of Professional Development and Practice Director, Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education said: ‘This programme of work will support all pharmacy professionals to make a big step forward to supporting patients in the reforming NHS. We need every patient facing pharmacist and pharmacy technicians to work through the six step model and improve their consultation skills’ Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians will be able to access the full range of resources from a new website, www.consultationskillsforpharmacy.com, including guidance, the practice standards, learning options, assessment tools and signposting to support. The website also offers advice to employers and trainers.