

Results: In total, 253 documents were identified. Following removal of duplicates and screening, 98 documents were included in the analysis. Most documents were published in the first three months of the pandemic (March-May 2020). A key theme related to medication prescribing and supply, with changes implemented to ensure continued access to medicines. In both NI and RoI, significant changes were made to emergency supply arrangements (e.g. increase in allowable duration of supply at the request of patients). In RoI, legislative changes were made to recognise Healthmail as the national electronic prescription transfer system and to temporarily extend prescription validity. In NI, many community pharmacy services (e.g. Minor Ailments Service, Medicines Use Review) were 'stood down' during initial months of the pandemic. Much of the communication in NI and RoI related to operational changes to ensure business continuity. In both jurisdictions a temporary register of pharmacists was introduced to allow previously registered pharmacists to contribute to the health service response. Additionally, in NI, General Dental Practitioners were redeployed to assist with community pharmacy response. Other areas of focus across both jurisdictions included infection control within a workplace setting, dealing with situations where staff were affected by COVID-19, and the use of personal protective equipment during pharmacy service provision.

Conclusion: This study examined changes in community pharmacy practice across two jurisdictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst our searches were limited to publicly accessible documents only, the overlap in identified changes reflects the similarities in challenges faced by community pharmacists in adapting and responding to COVID-19. The cross-country comparison may help pharmacists and policy-makers to identify optimal approaches for responding to any future public health crises.

References

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- (2) Maidment I, Young E, MacPhee M, Booth A, Zaman H, Breen J, Hilton A, Kelly T, Wong G. Rapid realist review of the role of community pharmacy in the public health response to COVID-19. *BMJ Open.* 2021; 11(6): e0500043

MPHARM STUDENTS' RESPONSE TO PHARMACY STAFF SHORTAGES DURING LOCKDOWN

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Introduction: During the first lockdown period of the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacy students, particularly those with previous experience, were encouraged to help address staff shortages in pharmacy practice (1).

Aim: This study investigated the response of pharmacy students at Keele University to the request for help to address staff shortages in practice during lockdown.

Methods: An online survey using Google Forms was developed based on addressing the aim of the study and a working knowledge of pharmacy practice. The survey was piloted on academic pharmacists, and after minor amendments, was disseminated to all students in years 2, 3 and 4 of the MPharm course, along with a participant information

sheet. Questions regarding consent were incorporated into the Google Form. The survey consisted of a range of question types: tick-box, Likert scale, multiple-choice and free text. A reminder email was sent out to increase response rate. The data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, using Microsoft Excel and SPSS version 24.0.

Results: The online survey was distributed to 352 students. A total of 106 responses were collected; providing a response rate of 30.1%. Fifty-nine (55.7%) of these students did not undertake paid employment in a pharmacy during lockdown, compared to 47 (44.3%) who did. Of the 47 who did, most obtained paid employment in a community pharmacy (n=42; 89%), the rest in hospital. Seventy percent of respondents (n = 74) had undertaken work experience in a community pharmacy prior to lockdown. A number of reasons were given for choosing not to work in a pharmacy, including needing time to study for exams or living with a vulnerable family member, but the most frequent reason reported (40.7%) was that students found it difficult to find work. For those students who did work in a pharmacy during lockdown, the reported reasons varied, with the most frequent being to gain experience (n = 35; 74.5%), followed by a sense of duty to help the community (n=31; 66.0%). The time spent working ranged from 8 to 40 hours per week. The majority of students reported working in the dispensary and on the medicines counter, undertaking a wide range of activities. Final year students and those who had previously undertaken work experience in a pharmacy were statistically more likely to obtain paid employment during lockdown. Perceived advantages to working during lockdown included the opportunity to improve communication and clinical skills and apply theory to practice, as well as being able to 'give back' to the community. 97.9% (n= 46) reported feeling under pressure whilst working, although 72.3% (n=34) reported that they enjoyed working despite this.

Conclusion: Pharmacy students had various reasons for choosing to work in practice or not during lockdown. Those who did work reported benefiting from the experience in a number of ways. This suggests that pharmacy students with prior experience of pharmacy working, should be encouraged to offer their support in times of staff shortages if future lockdowns occur.

Reference

- (1) Supporting the COVID-19 response: Joint Guidance: Facilitating deployment of pharmacy undergraduate students to support the pharmacy workforce. Health Education England, NHS Education for Scotland, Health Education and Improvement Wales, Pharmacy Schools Council, Royal Pharmaceutical Society and the British Pharmaceutical Students' Association. 09 April 2020, pp.1-9. Available at: <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/MPharm%20student%20deployment%20joint%20guidance%20FINAL.pdf> [Accessed 14 October 2021].

PROVIDING PHARMACY SUPPORT TO HOUSEBOUND PATIENTS: LEARNING FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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