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LPCs in the spotlight– Derbyshire and their media success

Derbyshire LPC has ended a year of developing their public relations by getting a half-page article in a local paper and launching a campaign with a charity who has never worked with pharmacy before.

The LPC had always had a publications relations and media budget allocation, but it was not until after a visit from Zoe Smeaton, Head of Communications and Public Affairs at PSNC, in November 2014 that they began to make real strides in this area. Derbyshire LPC Chief Officer Graham Archer explained: “We’re not media experts so needed Zoe to give us our starter for ten,” and it was then that the LPC decided what they really needed was a media specialist to help them with the day-to-day work.

So when LPC Chair John Sargeant met public relations director Matt Youdale at a network meeting, he quickly invited him to speak to the LPC. Not long after that his marketing company Arch Communications (<http://www.arch-comms.co.uk/>) was contracted to work with the LPC on a trial basis and their first recommendation was to start a blog.

Despite some scepticism at first, the blog has led to new contacts and involvement in projects that would never have happened without it. The Chair writes the blog, aiming it not at their usual audience but at key stakeholders. Key words from the blog posts are often picked up by others when searching the web, usually for healthcare related information, which has widened the LPC’s reach.

For example, May’s blog on the Electronic Prescription Service was found by the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC). After they alerted the local head of Information Management and Technology, it was arranged for them to come and speak at the next LPC meeting.

Derbyshire LPC has also been reaching out to different organisations to ask them to support their events. Some events were organised for pharmacy teams about bone health and the LPC invited a representative of the National Osteoporosis Society (NOS) to speak at them. Following the events, NOS has worked with the LPC to put together a toolkit for pharmacy teams which reached them in time for World Osteoporosis Day on 20th October.

This was the first time NOS has worked with the community pharmacy sector and – with considerable help from a local patient story – there has been widespread coverage in the local press and a live interview on Radio Derby with LPC chairman John Sargeant and the ‘expert patient’. The entire story was also featured on BBC East Midlands Today, which was filmed in a pharmacy owned by LPC member Linda Beech.

But that wasn’t the only time Linda Beech has been put in the limelight: last month she wrote a piece for the ‘My Week’ feature in the Derby Telegraph (see appendix). Linda’s article outlines what a community

pharmacist does 'behind the scenes', such as ordering medicines, and the title explains the myth she is trying to dispel: "We don't just count tablets, you know!"

There are of course costs attached to engaging professionals, but Graham says he finds it useful to be able to put the NHS press people he meets in touch with the LPC's own marketing company so they can work together. He even says that the media contacts that he lost through the NHS re-organisation have now been re-engaged due to this work.

Graham said: "We're still at start of the journey, but we have made a lot of progress!"

To find out more visit the Derbyshire LPC website at <http://www.derbyshirelpc.org/>

For more information about the LPCs in the Spotlight series contact mike.king@psnc.org.uk

MY WEEK

We don't just count tablets, you know!

MONDAY

As soon as we open, we're inundated with calls from patients wanting to re-order regular prescriptions. Automatic reordering can actually leave people with too much medication, which goes out of date before it can be used.

I spend much of the day going through prescriptions with patients to check they're actually getting what their doctor intended. This way, we save the NHS a lot of money, we work closely with the practice whose medical centre we share.

Work is a constant juggling act. We're protecting people's health, supporting the wider NHS and running an independent business (like GPs). Many don't think of us in commercial terms but we have to balance our finances like any other company. The costs of our premises and staff are down to us - and we don't get NHS pensions.

On the way home, I take drugs to a frail patient who finds it difficult to leave the house (the prescription had left for the day). Free deliveries for those who need it have become a core part of our service. The only way pharmacies can compete is through the quality of what we do.

LINDA BEECH

The founder and director of the Village Pharmacy in Sunny Hill, Derby, describes her working routine.



TUESDAY

Off to Highlam, near Alfreton, for a local pharmaceutical committee meeting (I'm a member). Among other things, we're the legally recognised body for pharmacy contractors in Derby and Derbyshire. It's our role to represent their interests with the NHS bodies and local authorities which commission us to provide services.

We'd like more responsibility and are pushing for a new national contract covering the key role of pharmacists in dealing with minor ailments. This will help the NHS to cope by relieving the burden on A&E and freeing up GP appointments.

Also known as Community Pharmacy Derbyshire, we've recently partnered with the

National Osteoporosis Society to raise awareness of brittle bones. It's been a big success. People have been asking if they may have the condition and some have been referred for tests as a result.

Running a business tends to mean long hours, so I try and take Tuesday afternoons off. Any spare time tends to be devoted to my family or local church.

WEDNESDAY

Most people think pharmacies are only about prescriptions, but we do many other things. Ask Your Pharmacist Week is a national initiative to remind people that we have much more to offer.

This morning I've helped a recovering addict on prescribed

methadone, given vaccination advice to someone planning a tropical holiday, and explained to a customer how they can be supported to stop smoking.

I also have flu jabs scheduled. Anyone can pay £10 to protect themselves but some at-risk patients can get them free. The NHS is funding them from pharmacies as well as GPs to increase the uptake of vaccinations by widening access. If you think you may qualify, just ask.

THURSDAY

Stock-taking today, which is quite a job. We process thousands of prescriptions every month and hold medicines worth £50,000 or more.

We buy the medication and the NHS only pays us back after we dispense it to a patient. This means we don't want to be over-stocked but at the same time, patients are inconvenienced if we run out - another example of the balancing act between running a business and providing a public service.

I chase up an overdue product with one drug company, and call another to ask how a patient with swallowing difficulties can take his much-needed medication.

The price of medicines is a hot topic. My contribution as a frontline pharmacist is to spot opportunities to reduce waste. An elderly lady calls me this afternoon because she is running low on some items for her poorly husband. I organise the delivery of a prescription and arrange for a specialist nurse to visit the couple to see if they need more support.

FRIDAY

Out to the home of a patient on long-term medication this morning for a medicines use review - a "medicines MOT" to check they have what they need. These reviews are a more detailed version of what we do with every prescription. A lot of my time is spent ensuring patients know what they're taking, why and when. Where people have lots of different things to take, we put together special packs to make it easy for them.

It's 23 years since I started Village Pharmacy. Our role is so varied these days, but people still tend to think we only count tablets and put them in bottles. Perhaps we need a pharmacy version of 'TV Dr Hilary to raise our profile! I'm not volunteering, though....