

1 **The national consultation skills for pharmacy practice programme in England**

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35**Abstract** Objective This paper aims to discuss the need to enhance pharmacy professionals'

36(pharmacists and pharmacy technicians) consultation skills in England and describe the development

37of a national consultation skills training programme to meet these needs. Methods The Centre for

38Pharmacy Postgraduate Education led on a project to create a consultation skills training programme

39for all pharmacy professionals across England. The programme embedded a set of consultation skills

40practice standards developed by a large task and finish group consisting of pharmacy professionals of

41varying roles from National Health Service (NHS), private pharmacy organisations and academia.

42Key findings A Consultation Skills for Pharmacy Practice (CSfPP) training programme, consisting of a

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50technician consultation skills.

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52**Disclosure statement** Conflicts of Interest: none.

The national consultation skills for pharmacy practice programme in England

Abstract *Background* Pharmacy professionals are playing an increasing role in caring for patients, yet evidence has shown their consultation skills are lacking. *Objective* This paper aims to discuss the need to enhance pharmacy professionals' (pharmacists and pharmacy technicians) consultation skills in England and describe the development of a national consultation skills training programme to meet these needs. *Methods* The Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education led on a project to create a consultation skills training programme for all pharmacy professionals across England. The programme embedded a set of consultation skills practice standards developed by a large task and finish group consisting of pharmacy professionals of varying roles from the National Health Service, private pharmacy organisations and academia. *Key findings* A Consultation Skills for Pharmacy Practice (CSfPP) training programme, consisting of a distance learning workbook and website, was produced and disseminated to all registered pharmacy professionals in England March, 2014. *Conclusions* The first consultation skills training programme of its kind was created that aimed to address the growing need to improve the consultations skills of pharmacy professionals in England. Future work will examine the reception of the CSfPP amongst pharmacy professionals and the impact it has on their practice.

Keywords Consultation skills; consultation skills training; pharmacist consultation skills; pharmacy technician consultation skills.

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Introduction

A national consultation skills training programme – the first of its kind – for all pharmacy professionals (pharmacists and pharmacy technicians) in England was launched in early 2014. This paper discusses the need for such a programme, how it was developed, a description of the programme, and how it was implemented. Whilst the focus of this article is on the development of consultation skills for pharmacy professionals in England, the utility of such a programme has pertinence to pharmacy professionals elsewhere as pharmacy, globally, is taking on a larger role in caring for patients.^{1, 2} The programme also has relevance to other healthcare professions as these skills are increasingly being developed through interprofessional learning.^{3,4}

Pharmacists are increasingly involved in caring for patients as pharmacy is encouraged to play a bigger role in, for example, supporting patients with long term conditions and detecting serious illnesses earlier.^{5, 6} Pharmacy technicians, currently working under the supervision of pharmacists, will also play a larger role in supporting patients.⁷ Together, they will face further involvement in patient care. To succeed in carrying out this extended role effectively, pharmacy professionals must move from a product-centric to a patient-centric approach to understand the patient perspective around medication use and support patients in decision-making.^{8, 9} In order for pharmacy professionals to move towards a patient-centric approach, they need to be proficient in consultation skills.

The term 'consultation skills' is being used here in the broadest sense and includes nomenclature such as 'pharmacist-patient communication' and, in particular, 'patient counselling'.^{10, 11} These terms are regularly used by authors to describe the process of advising patients on medication use. The ability to provide effective consultations has, however, been shown to be limited.¹²⁻¹⁷ It is important for pharmacy professionals to possess effective consultation skills as they can help improve medication adherence and also improve patient satisfaction, leading to better outcomes.^{9, 18, 19} Therefore, there is a need for improving pharmacy professionals' consultation skills to enable them to support patients effectively.^{20, 21}

In the UK, there is increasing demand for pharmacy professionals to possess effective consultation skills due to changes in the services pharmacies are expected provide in their contract with the National Health Service (NHS).²² Changes have also taken place in pharmacy education, with the push for enhancing skills in consultation skills evident in pharmacy curricula. The education

standards for the four year (full-time) undergraduate Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) degree course lists the development of effective communication skills as a key educational outcome.²³ Research by Willis et al. and McAteer et al. has shown that the MPharm degree may serve to build communication skills for consulting patients according to the views of 4th year MPharm students and graduates.^{24, 25} However, in interviews with individuals involved in recruiting pharmacy graduates, Langley and Aheer found that graduates' communication skills were believed to be lacking.²⁶ Jee et al. corroborated these findings in a later study that examined the views of pharmacists that supervised graduates during their year of pre-registration training.²⁷ Similar findings, showing weaknesses in pharmacy graduates communication skills, have been demonstrated outside of the UK.²⁸ Therefore, it would appear that there is room for improving pharmacy professionals' consultation skills following formal (i.e. university-based) education and training. (Communication is also an area emphasised in syllabi for pharmacy technician education and training though there is, comparatively, a dearth of research investigating communication skills in pharmacy technicians.²³)

Attempting to train individuals in consultation skills may be more difficult following formal education and training, though pharmacy professionals have shown a desire to improve their skills. Al-Nagar et al. conducted a survey of a large sample of pharmacists and showed that the majority of respondents would welcome more training in consultation skills.²⁹ This suggested that consultation skills training was in demand and, with it being a necessary area for pharmacy professionals to improve, there was an opportunity to develop consultation skills training programme.

The development of the consultation skills training programme for pharmacy professionals in England

The development of the consultation skills training programme, the Consultation Skills for Pharmacy Practice (CSfPP) programme, followed work undertaken by the pharmacy board of Health Education England (HEE), a special health authority that ensures the NHS workforce has the right skills and training to support the delivery of excellent healthcare and drive improvements.^{30, 31} The pharmacy board recommended that post-registration pharmacy professionals needed to improve their skills in working with patients, other healthcare professionals and members of the public. Pharmacy professionals would also need to improve the safety, value and effectiveness of medication use and enhance their skills in the delivery of public health interventions.³² In light of these recommendations, HEE placed training pharmacy professionals in consultation skills as a key educational priority to

address. A team of learning development pharmacists at The Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education (CPPE), funded by HEE, was tasked to lead on developing a consultation skills training programme.³³

Initially, a set of practice standards for consultation skills that set out the standard of knowledge, skills and behaviours expected of all pharmacy professionals to carry out effective consultations were created.³⁴ The standards fall under a range of rubrics described in Table 1. Once the consultation skills practice standards had been established, work on the programme design began. The programme was conceptualised with consultations defined in the broadest sense as ‘any discussion between a healthcare professional and a person.’³⁵ This definition could thus apply to all pharmacy professionals in all sectors and in all situations with patients.

The CSfPP programme guides professionals through a learning pathway (Figure 1) to help them reflect on, develop and improve their consultation skills. The first step along the pathway ensures that learners understand the importance of consultation skills for the benefits to patients and for the recognition and respect of the profession. Acknowledgement of the need to change and improve is an important preparatory step for learning.³⁶ The second step guides learners through the consultation practice standards to raise awareness of the standard of practice expected of them.³⁴ The third step is a reflective process which allows pharmacy professionals to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of their consultations skills and behaviours. Self-assessment is undertaken using the medication-related consultation framework (MRCF) and feedback from colleagues, other healthcare professionals and patients.^{37, 38} Additionally, users have the opportunity to watch a videoed consultation and analyse and critique the skills demonstrated which supports development of skill discrimination, an important stage in the learning cycle.³⁹

The fourth step supports learners in improving their consultation skills by presenting core learning material in addition to referring learners to a range of additional learning materials and workshops that CPPE offer. These include local face-to-face workshops on consultation skills and access to videos that display consultations conducted well or poorly. The fifth step provides users with the opportunity to assess their learning and development through the use of online assessment. Divided into four sections, section one assesses knowledge base using multiple choice questions. The remaining sections require learners to apply observational skills to identify specific consultation skills and behaviours in videotaped consultations. Learners rate the performance of skills

demonstrated which leads to a pass or fail score. Learners are then provided with standardised feedback outlining the steps others have taken to enable a successful pass. The sixth, and final, step encourages learners to use the programme as part of their continuing professional development (CPD) and engage with the CSfPP programme continuously.

The development work to create the CSfPP programme and associated learning resources was completed in early 2014. The resources included a distance learning workbook and a website that guide pharmacy professionals through the six-step pathway.

Implementation

All pharmacy professionals in England were mailed a CSfPP distance learning workbook in March, 2014. This was accompanied by a letter signed by the Chief Pharmaceutical Officer for NHS England outlining the relevance and importance of developing consultation skills in pharmacy professionals. This coincided with the launch of the consultation skills website.

The distance learning workbook:

The 124-page CSfPP distance learning workbook provides the bulk of the 'learning' with sections that cover a range of topics that fall under six sections:

- Medicines optimisation and medication adherence
- Effective communication
- Consultation models and the theory behind them
- Effective consultation skills
- Health coaching in patient consultations
- Moving your practice forward

Explanations on the importance and applicability of each section to pharmacy practice are provided at the beginning of each section. The material in the distance learning workbook is informed by literature to ensure the material is supported with evidence. Throughout the workbook users are referred to supplementary videos that provide more information on the topic being covered. Passive learning is avoided through exercise questions and practice points embedded throughout with suggested answers at the end of each section. Reflective questions are included to encourage self-reflection on practice and support self-assessment. Based on the experience of pharmacists working within CPPE who reviewed and completed the CSfPP programme prior to its implementation, it was expected that the average learner would take approximately 10 hours to complete the reading and activities in the distance learning workbook.

The website

The key function of the open-access CSfPP website (www.consultationskillsforpharmacy.com) is to house the practice standards for consultation skills and to support users through the six step learning pathway. Importantly, the fifth step of the learning pathway (online assessment) is on the website. Additional areas of the website support employers and trainers and share useful resources developed by the professional body.⁴⁰ Users can also access a share and support area which directs them to social media resources to share experiences of good practice. Based on the experience of pharmacists working within CPPE who reviewed and completed the CSfPP programme prior to its implementation, it was expected that the average learner would take approximately eight hours to complete the self-reflection and assessment activities on the website.

Further dissemination and marketing

In addition to the implementation of the CSfPP website and distribution of the distance learning workbook, pharmacy professionals were made aware of the programme through an article published in a professional journal prior to its launch and in promotional emails sent to professional networks from the task and finish group.⁴¹ In addition to this, following the launch of the programme, CPPE began holding CSfPP training workshops – more practical sessions for pharmacy professionals to attend based on the content of the workbook and website – led by trained facilitators around the country. As of August, 2015, there have been 138 consultation skills workshops held, attended by 2380 pharmacy professionals.

Discussion and conclusion

The development of the CSfPP programme to support pharmacy professionals in enhancing their consultation skills has been a major new initiative for the pharmacy profession in England. It is the first programme of its kind to be produced. Whilst the CSfPP programme was developed for pharmacy professionals in England, it has relevance to pharmacy professionals elsewhere. The profession as a whole is taking on a larger role and using consultation skills as part of an increasing role in caring for patients.^{1, 2} Furthermore, the CSfPP has relevance to other healthcare professionals as these skills are commonly being acquired through interprofessional learning.^{3,4}

To ensure that the benefits of the programme are realised, future work must be undertaken. Research into the CSfPP programme's ability to influence change on practice is currently underway. A qualitative study has begun that aims to understand the impact the CSfPP has had on pharmacists' consultation skills. Additionally, a larger-scale research project will be carried

out as part of a PhD programme and this will evaluate the utility and impact of the CSfPP on pharmacists' consultation skills nationally, on a large scale. It is paramount that such promising initiatives are met with interest and enthusiasm and that such programmes can translate to changes in practice and ultimately patient outcomes. The aforementioned research projects will help determine if these ambitions are being realised.

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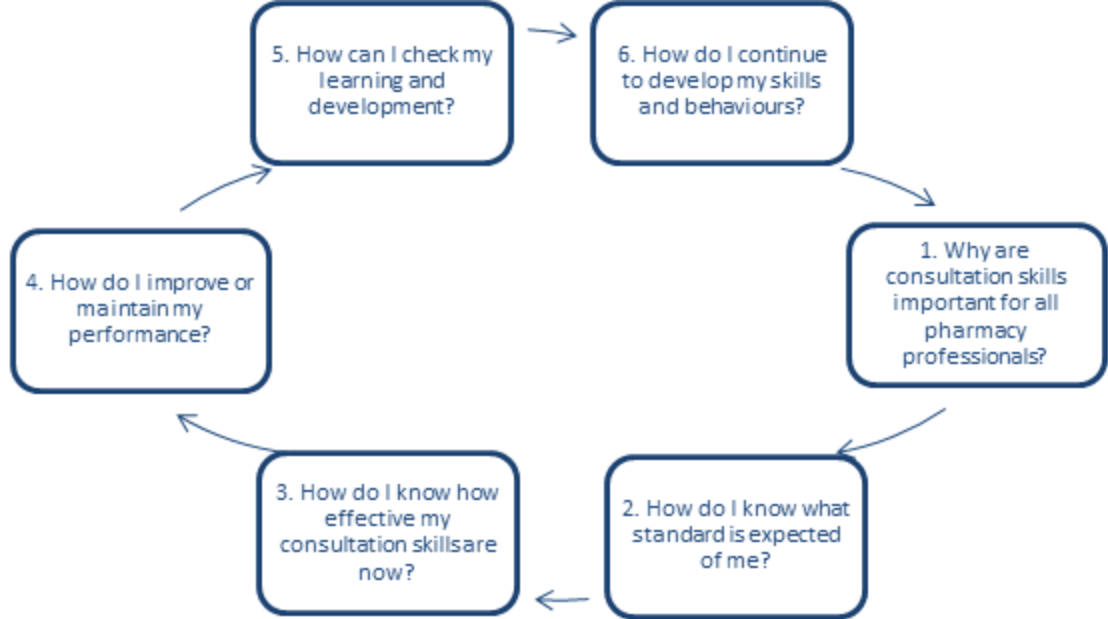


Table 1: Consultation skills for pharmacy practice standards

Standard	Coverage
The management of patient-centred consultations	Organisational and management skills; key consultation skills behaviours including health coaching
Context specific skills	Establishing additional information or communicating more specialised information to a patient
How to deliver a comprehensive approach to patient care	Effectively managing and addressing a wide range of illnesses
Understanding the health needs of your local population	Understanding the interrelationship between health and social care
The essential features that relates to you as a pharmacy professional	Understanding the importance of contextual aspects of practice (e.g. autonomy; work environment) and possessing appropriate attitudes and values, and up-to-date clinical knowledge
