

Role of Hospital Pharmacists during Covid-19



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Pharmacists have played a crucial role in combating Covid-19. Community pharmacists have become the first point of contact for many of the public due to restricted GP access. Our colleagues in research and education have led the way in developing vaccines and public health information guidelines and our comrades in industry have been conducting clinical trials, overcoming drug-shortages, developing new science for our vaccines and ensuring safe manufacturing and supply of vaccines. And now as we enter the immunisation stage of fighting the virus, it is pharmacists from community and hospital who are involved in the preparation and delivery of the vaccine. It is undeniable that pharmacists have played a vital part in this current pandemic due to our accessibility, expertise and diverse role across many areas of healthcare.

As a hospital pharmacist, our role and duties have changed

with a focus on managing the treatment of Covid-19 patients. As the pandemic continued to sabotage many countries and healthcare systems, there was an increasing amount of new research and clinical trials being published. It is imperative as a pharmacist to keep abreast with the new research and guidelines. The guidance surrounding the virus is ever-changing and so it is important to maintain continued professional development. Webinars from the IOP and UKCPA provided insight into how other hospitals were treating Covid-19 patients and also reviewing any pharmaceutical journal papers or pharmaceutical bulletins from NICE highlighted any potential practice changing ideas. I meet with the Respiratory Team daily who would often identify new drugs or ideas that are being tried and tested in the area. I liaise with our Medicines Information department about any queries.

Many of the day-to-day duties of a hospital pharmacist during the pandemic include advising the medical team on dosing and use of medications to treat the virus, to review a patient's medications and to ensure their safe use while infected; for example it is advised that certain diabetic medications be held while a patient has Covid 19 due to the increased risk to the patient from suffering a diabetic ketoacidosis. Covid 19 causes the blood to become hyper viscous and so a subcutaneous anticoagulant is recommended. The pharmacist will check the dose based on whether the drug is being used therapeutically or prophylactically and will ensure the correct dose based on patient's weight and renal function. Due to many patients developing blood disorders from the virus and requiring anticoagulation, it is the role of the pharmacist to provide education to the patients about their new blood thinning medications.

Working with other medical teams is also part of the diversity that being the respiratory pharmacist brings. It is important to receive guidance from the experts in specific medical areas. Hydroxychloroquine was a medication used to treat Covid-19 initially and this involved a discussion with Cardiology regarding QTc intervals and how often to do ECGs. Discussions with Haematology ensued regarding dosing of anticoagulants in Covid-19 patients and Rheumatology expertise was required for the use of Tocilizumab in the patients.

Procurement of medications has proved to be a challenge during the pandemic. As new guidance emerges, the demand for different medications increases. Informing and liaising with purchasing is vital to ensure the adequate supply and stock of requisite drugs and other medical products in accordance to the patients' demand.

The HSE developed guidelines throughout the last year with Remdesivir being a drug of choice after successful use in clinical trials. To be used in the hospital, it is required to set up a clinical trial and this involved receiving specific training. It involved meeting with the Respiratory consultant and Principle Investigator and both the ICU and clinical trials pharmacist. The clinical trials pharmacist was also involved in the procurement and dispensing of Remdesivir as per clinical trial protocol. As the respiratory pharmacist it was important to ensure that the patient met the requirements for the trial and that the medication was suitable to be used.

As the SARS-CoV-2 evolves so too does the role of the pharmacist in its fight against this deadly virus. Adaptability and diversity have proven pharmacists to be key in this ongoing fight. As hospital numbers decrease, pharmacists will diversify again and take on new roles as vaccinators in the next stage of the fight against Covid-19. Hospital pharmacists in many areas, ICU, Dispensary and Clinical Pharmacists have provided crucial roles in this pandemic and continue to provide medication expertise to the medical teams and patients.