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What does your job entail?

There are several aspects to my role, first and foremost, I am a clinical pharmacist. This involves 'clinically screening' chemotherapy prescriptions to ensure treatment has been prescribed appropriately; preparing new chemotherapy regimens; checking prepared chemotherapy; providing advice to doctors and nurses about chemotherapy and other medication; counselling patients; and working with pharmacy technical staff regarding ordering of stock and preparation of chemotherapy. I am also an independent prescriber and I run a haematology clinic where I conduct reviews with patients and prescribe chemotherapy for particular haematological conditions. Chemotherapy is prepared in an aseptic unit; this means that products are prepared in an environment so that they are free from micro-organisms. I am responsible for ensuring appropriate monitoring is conducted and products are made to a specified standard.

How did you get into this line of work?

I was always interested in science at school. I had considered doing medicine; however, I wasn't sure if I wanted the commitment of a long training pathway and constantly relocating during the training years. I did some work experience in a pharmacy and found the pharmacists to be very knowledgeable and well respected by patients. Doctors and other healthcare professionals would often ask for their advice. I continued to work part-time as a student in a pharmacy. I attended the Queen's University Belfast Pharmacy open day and found the lecturers and other academic staff to be very enthusiastic and passionate about their field, this inspired me to apply to study pharmacy.

Outline your career to date

Following my pre-registration year in community pharmacy, I applied for a job as a hospital pharmacist as I thought it seemed very interesting. In my first role, I worked as a junior pharmacist in a hospital in the main dispensary and also in the renal unit, conducting medication reviews for patients on dialysis. Following that, I moved to Craigavon Area Hospital and worked as a rotational pharmacist on wards and the aseptic unit. At this time, I also worked in the total parenteral nutrition (TPN) department in the aseptic unit. TPN is used for patients (including premature babies) whose nutrition must be provided directly into a vein. After this I moved into a senior pharmacist role within the aseptic unit.

Tell us about your qualifications and training

I have 10 GCSEs (including double award science) and three A-Levels (which include chemistry and biology). I graduated from Queen's University Belfast with a 1st class honours in a Master of Pharmacy degree which lasted four years. I then completed a pre-registration training year, after which I was a fully qualified pharmacist. I commenced my hospital pharmacy career as a band 6 pharmacist, which is entry level. During this time, I completed and obtained a distinction in a postgraduate Masters in Clinical Pharmacy, which lasted three years. Following this, I completed my postgraduate certificate in independent prescribing, which lasted a further year.

What qualities are required for your job – personal and professional?

This job requires you to be a good communicator and to work well with others. I interact with patients on a daily basis, so you also have to be a good listener and have empathy. You need to have a good concentration span and be a good team leader. Mathematical skills as well as an interest in science are essential.

What is the best advice you've ever received?

The best piece of advice I have ever received was, "No-one will ever know everything". When you start any new role, it can seem overwhelming, and you may expect a lot of yourself. Even though I am now a senior pharmacist, I learn something new each day. Science and medicine are so dynamic and constantly changing as more treatments are discovered. I complete at least 30 hours per year of continuing professional development (CPD) to ensure my skills and knowledge are kept as up to date as possible.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I have four young children, so I spend most of my spare time with them exploring the outdoors and swimming. I also like going for long walks and meeting up with friends for coffee or dinner.

What advice would you give your 16 year old self?

Talk to as many people as you can who are currently working in roles you may be interested in as they will give you a realistic version of what it's actually like. Gain as much work experience as you can for the same reason. If you need to take some time out following exams to gain experience and help with decision making, it is ok to do that. Very few people know at such a young age what they want to do with the rest of their lives and this can be overwhelming when it comes to making decisions about A-levels and higher education.