

National hospital pharmacy vacancy survey 1999

Purpose To provide data on aspects of recruitment to hospital pharmacist and technician (MTO) posts.

Authors NHS Pharmacy Education and Development Committee with approval from Department of Health, Office of Chief Pharmacist

Scope All NHS hospitals in England, Wales and Scotland.

Method A questionnaire (Annex 1) was sent to each hospital or NHS Trust by the education pharmacist in each region. Non-responders were followed-up with repeated requests. Free text comments were encouraged.

Results 287 pharmacies responded out of 297 identified and surveyed. There were 10 non-responders.

Previous reports

Similar reports were issued on 20th December 1996, covering the period August 1995 - July 1996, and 20th December 1998, covering the period August 1997 - July 1998.

Contact: Dr D.K. Scott
Pharmacy Department
John Radcliffe Hospital
Oxford OX3 9DU
Tel: 01865 221808 Fax: 01865 221828
e-mail oxpharm@globalnet.co.uk

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Background and Summary

In response to demands from various sources for accurate data on the current state of recruitment and retention in hospital pharmacy, the NHS Pharmacy Education and Development Committee undertook a survey of all NHS hospitals in Great Britain.

The methodology and style were similar to surveys completed 1 and 3 years earlier; the survey included technicians in MTO grades 1-5 and pharmacists in Whitley Council grades A to H.

There was an almost complete response (97%); only 10 out of 297 pharmacies did not reply.

The results demonstrate that there were a large number of vacancies at the time of the survey and these were not just at the most junior grades.

Combining data from all three surveys shows a marked trend to re-grade staff in an attempt to overcome recruitment and retention difficulties.

The total of 637 whole-time equivalent (wte) pharmacist vacancies may be compared with the number of trainees in the service (fewer than 400 this year and very few expected in the coming year because of changes in undergraduate education).

Recruitment and retention difficulties have led to reductions in service, or to refusal of requests for new services, in half of all hospitals in each of the last two years.

Pharmacies have resorted to a variety of methods to cope with the situation, these include:

- withdrawing or refusing services
- regrading staff or enhancing salaries (approximately 14% of pharmacists in 1998-99 in addition to 7% who had posts regraded in 1997-98)
- working extra hours, and
- restructuring departments to match available personnel rather than a desirable skill-mix.

Difficulties in recruitment are continuing to worsen and are increasingly affecting senior grades.

Headline figures from numerical data

Unless otherwise stated, data refer to whole time equivalents (wte) and to changes over the one year period to 31st July 1999. Please see free-text comments for other trends.

On 31st July 1999 there were vacancies for 637.3 pharmacists and 294.3 technicians. These included posts for 215 A/B grades, 179 C grades and 138 D grades. 14.7% of all pharmacist posts were vacant, 30.9% of A/B grades, 17.5% of C grades and 9.4% of D grades.

50% of all pharmacies surveyed had withdrawn services or refused new services because of inability to recruit or retain staff during the year surveyed. This is in addition to the 49% who withdrew services in the previous year.

51% of pharmacies had regraded posts for recruitment reasons, in addition to the 43% who did so the previous year. Over the two years 518 pharmacists (14%) have had their posts regraded and a further 255 had salary enhancements in 1998-99 (data not requested for 1997-98).

92 A-C grade pharmacist posts have been lost in the last year and 181 D-F grade posts gained. Some of these changes are due to conversion of pharmacist posts to MTO/ATO posts, of which half were to overcome recruitment difficulties and half for skill-mix purposes. MTO posts show a similar decrease in the lowest grade and increases at higher grades.

Comments

Respondents were invited to add additional or explanatory comments, especially with regard to restructuring that was intended to overcome recruitment difficulties. They were asked to give examples of work now done by MTOs that would previously have been done by pharmacists.

A/B/C grades

A grades are used less commonly now and then usually only for a few weeks prior to conversion to B grade. 50 trusts, ie 17% and an increase of 27 during the last year, reported that they no longer have A/B grades separate from C grades. Presumably, most of these are because they have sliding-scale appointments but some may not be.

13 trusts do not have C grades separate from D grades.

MTO1-3

94 pharmacies (33%) do not have separate MTO1 grades. In 1998, several respondents commented on the use of sliding scales for MTOs.

Restructuring

39 wte pharmacist posts were converted to MTO/ATO posts for skill-mix reasons and 26.6 posts for recruitment reasons. A number of free-text remarks indicated that MTO posts had been converted to ATOs for similar reasons.

It is clear that the structure of the service has changed markedly in recent years, as identified numerically between the 1998 and 1999 surveys. When calculated on a common set of hospitals (excluding only 12 who did not complete both surveys), the service has gained 96 pharmacist posts but the number occupied has increased by only 43. It is noticeable that the lower pharmacist grades (A-C) lost 92 posts whereas the D-F grades increased by 181.

These data are entirely consistent with several reported trends, namely:

- promotion of staff to aid retention
- re-grading of vacant posts to enhance recruitment
- skill-mix adjustments

Total MTO posts increased by 70 but only 48 were occupied. There were 85 fewer trainees due to qualify than there were vacancies.

In 1999 there were about 43 more pharmacists and 48 more MTOs in the service than there were in 1998.

New roles for MTOs and ATOs

Respondents were asked to identify new roles for MTOs and ATOs developed within the last three years. Numbers are quoted to give an idea of the relative extent of each role. They are not accurate measures of the number of such arrangements because some respondents will have forgotten to mention some developments and others will have had them in place before the 3-year period.

Very many pharmacies now use MTOs in managerial roles, especially with regard to other MTOs, ATOs and training posts. Some extend this to management of pharmacists and to dispensaries (20), aseptic or production units (13), and purchasing, stores and IT functions(22).

Ward services, including drug-history taking, Patient's Own Drugs, and Self-administration schemes (14), and an undefined clinical role (8) have added to the stock top-up role which is now very common. The latter role is now often performed by ATOs (37) who are also increasingly involved in dispensing (35) including controlled drugs (3).

MTOs are doing final dispensing checks (105), supplying controlled drugs (20), counselling patients (16) and working in drug information (12).

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Trust grades were converted to Whitley equivalents.
Posts spanning two grades (e.g. C to D) were counted at the higher grade.

287 units, from 297 identified and surveyed, submitted data.

Posts available & occupied on 31.7.99

Pharmacists	Posts available (wte)	Posts occupied (wte)	% Occupied	Posts as % of total	Occupied as % of total
A or B	696.0	482.4	69.3	16.1	13.1
C	1015.8	839.0	82.6	23.5	22.7
D	1459.5	1321.0	90.5	33.7	35.8
E	668.5	623.6	93.3	15.4	16.9
F	300.0	244.7	81.6	6.9	6.6
G or H	187.9	182.5	97.1	4.3	4.9
All pharmacists	4327.7	3693.2	85.3	100.0	100.0
Technicians					
MTO 1	368.5	368.7	100.1	9.6	10.4
MTO 2	2197.2	1945.6	88.5	57.0	54.7
MTO 3	1060.1	1024.2	96.6	27.5	28.8
MTO 4	199.4	195.4	98.0	5.2	5.5
MTO 5	26.7	25.7	96.3	0.7	0.7
Qualified MTOs	3851.9	3559.6	92.4	100.0	100.0
MTO trainee 1	250.0	222.0	88.8		
MTO trainee 2	209.0	207.0	99.0		
All MTOs	4310.9	3988.6	92.5		

142 units withdrew or refused services because of recruitment difficulties of which:
82 units withdrew services and
119 units refused new services

147 units regraded posts or enhanced salaries as a recruitment/retention aid:
111 units regraded 252 pharmacist posts
55 units regraded 103 MTO posts
66 units enhanced salaries of 255 pharmacists
24 units enhanced salaries of 88 MTO posts

For skill-mix reasons,
42 units converted 39 pharmacist posts to 45.5 MTO posts and 24 ATO posts.

For recruitment reasons,
24 units converted 26.8 pharmacist posts to 28.6 MTO posts and 18 ATO posts.

49 units do not have established A/B posts separate from C grades
13 units do not have established C posts separate from D grades.

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1998 and 1999

	Changes between July 1998 and July 1999				
	Total posts	Occupied posts	adjusted to same set of hospitals Total posts	Occupied posts	Vacancies
Pharmacists					
A or B	-105.9	-45.8	-87.8	-29.7	-58.1
C	-37.4	-40.6	-4.4	-15.2	10.8
D	34.8	-9.4	79.3	31.5	47.8
E	49.4	38.0	67.4	55.0	12.4
F	28.2	-13.2	34.2	-9.2	43.4
G or H	4.7	7.3	7.7	10.3	-2.6
All pharmacists	-26.2	-63.7	96.4	42.7	53.7
Technicians					
MTO 1	-97.9	-61.5	-73.9	-27.5	-46.4
MTO 2	13.2	-68.9	93.2	18.0	75.2
MTO 3	1.5	-2.9	34.1	28.4	5.7
MTO 4	13.1	26.7	19.1	32.7	-13.6
MTO 5	-3.1	-4.1	-2.1	-3.1	1
Qualified MTOs	-73.2	-110.7	70.4	48.5	21.9

Notes:

Data were unavailable for 1 unit in 1998 and 10 units in 1999. Adjusted figures exclude those 11 hospitals and are therefore based on a common set of hospitals.

During this period, 252 pharmacist posts were re-graded and 65.8 were converted to MTO/ATO posts. 103 MTO posts were re-graded and 74.1 were created by conversion from pharmacist posts. An unknown number of MTO posts were converted to ATO posts. (ATO refers to any non-pharmacist, non-MTO post).

Proportion of posts according to grade and occupancy.

	1999 posts as % of all posts	1999 occupied as % of total	1998 posts as % of all posts	1998 occupied as % of total
Pharmacists	1999	1999	1998	1998
A or B	16.0	13.0	18.3	14.0
C	23.5	22.8	24.2	23.5
D	33.8	35.8	32.8	35.5
E	15.4	16.9	14.2	15.6
F	6.9	6.6	6.2	6.9
G or H	4.3	4.9	4.2	4.6
All pharmacists	100	100	100	100
Technicians	1999	1999	1998	1998
MTO 1	9.5	10.3	11.8	11.7
MTO 2	57.0	54.7	55.6	54.9
MTO 3	27.5	28.8	27.0	28.0
MTO 4	5.2	5.5	4.8	4.6
MTO 5	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.8
Qualified MTOs	100	100	100	100