

INNOVATIVE

SERVICES

AND A DOSE

OF PASSION

THE CHARNWOOD STORY

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‘Having, compelled by, or ruled by intense emotion or strong feeling; fervid.’

The www.dictionary.com definition of the word *passionate*—a word that is all too commonly used in today’s society to describe someone with a bit of drive.

But this doesn’t apply to the 2014 Pharmacy of the Year winner Capital Chemist Charnwood, who have demonstrated they are worthy winners by being passionate about their community, passionate about providing quality professional services, passionate about innovation, passionate about their team and most of all passionate about improving the health outcomes for their patients.

In a field of inspiring and talented pharmacies, Capital Chemist Charnwood from the ACT has proven they truly are champions of community pharmacy.

As our industry leaders are encouraging the move to a professional service model, I took the opportunity to talk with Samantha Kourtis, Managing Partner at Capital Chemist Charnwood, to gain insight as to how she went about establishing an innovative service that had them crowned with this most prestigious award.

Can you tell me about the professional services you provide?

We have a number of professional services that we provide to the local and surrounding communities.



Our free baby clinic is run by a qualified maternal and child health nurse who has been with the pharmacy for over twenty years. We have a diverse population in a fairly low socio-economic area with low health literacy. The fact that mums can bring their babies down to the local pharmacy and have access to free, high quality advice is a great relief and support for them.

Recently we extended our trading hours from 7.30 am until 9 pm and identified that there is an after hours need assisting with mental health and other crises. Our senior staff members have all undergone mental health first aid training, and we have a private area for customers to access a crisis support helpline. We have collaborated with the ACT Medicare Local and BeyondBlue to establish the NewAccess program in our pharmacy.

The professional service that I believe won us the category title of Innovation in Professional Services, is our wound care and medical compression garment fitting service. Three pharmacists are trained and qualified to measure and fit compression garments for patients with venous insufficiency or lymphoedema. We have referral rights into the ACT public health system, specifically the lymphoedema and wound care clinics. Conversely, lower risk patients who can be managed effectively in the community are referred to us for fitting and supply of garments, therefore reducing the burden and waiting times at the clinics for higher risk patients.

What led you to introducing these services? Was it demographic need or identified service gaps?

As with every service I've implemented, whether it be the baby clinic, mental health support or my wound care and lymphoedema service, it has to be something I have an interest and passion for. Then I look at population demographics to see if there is a need.

Did you complete a needs assessment, market research or business impact review before you implemented these services?

To put it simply, no. Our country is in crisis in every area of health. It needs anything and everything to be done.

Pharmacy is a place where we can and do make a difference in addressing the health needs of our community.



INNOVATIVE SERVICES AND A DOSE OF PASSION

THE CHARNWOOD STORY (CONTINUED)

‘Our country is in crisis in every area of health. It needs anything and everything to be done.’



We see a patient in crisis and we ask ourselves, ‘What can I do to stop this from happening for this person, and the next?’

That’s where we can all come up with great ideas to support the health and wellbeing of our community locally, and at large.

What do you think is the most important consideration in implementing a new service?

Making good business decisions is of course important. Know your competitors, do your market research, find your niche and crunch the numbers. However, I don’t think these are the most important things for success.

As I have said before, you have to have a passion for what you do. This will give you the motivation and energy to put everything into making your service successful.

Just as important is having appropriate skills, training and qualifications in the area. To be trusted and accepted as a centre of excellence for the service you provide, you have to know what you’re talking about.

It is easy to go out and purchase a whole range of compression garment stock to sell, but without the expertise to fit them correctly, there is a danger that you will make the problem worse. You don’t want to cause harm to your patient or risk your professional reputation.

Supportive staff is essential. Involve them in the planning and ideas. Invest in their training and professional development and in return you will have positive, motivated and loyal staff. The flow on effect to the bottom line of your business will be monumental.

How did you get your foot in the door for the networking opportunities with other health providers? How did you gain their trust?

I worked as a pharmacy assistant from the age of 15 before studying a Bachelor of Science and then pharmacy. I realised early on that I had an interest in wound care. It sounds disgusting, but I loved looking at wounds, smelling them, providing the right dressing and watching them heal!

While I was studying, I joined the Australian Wound Management Association and later gained my Diploma in Wound Management. This introduced me to a huge allied health network and clinical education opportunities.

They got to know me because I turned up regularly. First they just recognised my face, then we would get talking. It took years, but I was able to demonstrate my commitment to this area of practice by being involved, asking questions, referring patients and eventually working on real cases together.

What was the impact to the pharmacy on implementing these services?

I became managing partner in March 2013 and was lucky that the pharmacy had gone through an extensive refit and looked spectacular with a very professional feel. We had a dedicated consultation room and sufficient space to stock a full range of compression garments.

The initial outlay for stock was in the order of \$25,000. I had to provide training to staff so that the service could run independently on any trading day.

What documentation have you produced—procedures, special apps?

We have developed a web-based software program to capture patient details including measurements, garments, clinical data and progress notes. We also have a referral pad for use by the hospital clinics.

We have documented policies and procedures around the delivery of all services which is helpful for training new staff, and for referring to as needed on a daily basis.

How has QCPP been connected in this process?

I find that QCPP makes me mindful of the background systems a business needs in place to enable it to run smoothly and be able to deliver quality products and services for our customers. I customise the templates to my business and services, and it helps me not to leave anything out.

How do you promote the services?

I don't have time to formally promote the services I provide because I'm too busy providing them.

Most of the promotion is from word of mouth. Not many other pharmacies offer the range and expertise in compression garments and their fitting, so word gets around. I also have referral rights to clinics with ACT Health and they refer patients to me.

My team has been trained to identify patients within the pharmacy. For example, someone might ask where the dressings are, but my staff first ask to look at the wound. They have an excellent awareness of what looks simple versus something that needs to be referred to the pharmacist for more intensive treatment or onwards referral to a doctor or specialist.

What were the staff reactions to introducing these new services when you had just taken over as managing partner?

They were excited to be doing something new. They were worried about their jobs because of the talk about job cuts due to accelerated price disclosure. They saw it as an opportunity for their own career development and increasing their skills to maintain their employability.

What are the positives for your pharmacy business, your staff and the local community in introducing these services?

There have been huge positives. Financially, it has grown my business substantially. Even with the initial layout to purchase stock and train staff, my gross profit dollars have increased exponentially.

My staff have satisfaction and fulfilment from their jobs, and it has brought them together as a team with an ignited passion. We love getting the positive feedback from our customers and this simple appreciation of our efforts has the result of more engaged and committed staff. They feel valued and excited to be making a difference.

It has also strengthened bonds in the Charnwood community. We are seen as a one-stop health destination and recognised as a centre of excellence with customers and other health professionals alike.

'People have come to expect that we will address their health needs or refer them to the right person who can. We capture them in our "sticky spider web" and bounce them off in the direction they need.'

Often customers say they come to my pharmacy because they know we'll fix it. That tells me and my staff that they expect solutions from us and that drives us to continually improve and have a quality focus in everything we do.

The most important benefit is that the local community have improved health outcomes and reassurance that they can access a quality health service.

So in summary Samantha, what are the three top pieces of advice that you would give to other pharmacies who are thinking of establishing innovative professional services.

Firstly, find your passion. What do you love doing? What inspires you? Intrigues you? What do you excel at? OR, what skills and interest do your team have? Use that passion to propel your ideas and your business.

Secondly, upskill. What extra training do you and your staff need to undertake to be knowledgeable and skilled in the area of practice?

Finally, take a team approach. Discover the interests and specific skills or work styles of your team and use it to your advantage. Create a vision for your pharmacy together and enrol everyone on the journey. ■