

Continuous Improvement Discussion Paper – March 2010

Introduction

Service Skills Australia is commencing the continuous improvement of the SIR07 Retail Services Training Package in the Community Pharmacy industry. This continuous improvement project will focus on the community pharmacy qualifications as a standalone set. The continuous improvement process provides the opportunity for industry, training organisations, employers, employees and any other stakeholders wishing to be involved and provide input into the further skills and knowledge requirements of the community pharmacy industry sector.

This discussion paper is aimed at scoping the changing landscape in the community pharmacy industry and the impact of this on the skills required for jobs within this industry.

There are three community pharmacy qualifications in the current Retail Services Training Package:

- Certificate II in Community Pharmacy
- Certificate III in Community Pharmacy
- Certificate IV in Community Pharmacy

Aim of the paper

This discussion paper forms the basis for the initial collection of information and feedback that will be used to develop recommendations on amendments to the SIR07 Retail Services Training Package.

An essential component of the maintenance and continuous improvement of any training package is an in-depth understanding of all the issues facing an industry. For the community pharmacy industry this means not only understanding changes in technology, products and services but also includes workforce development issues and trends, and any implementation issues relating to the current training package.

The Community Pharmacy Industry

The community pharmacy industry is made up of mainly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Community pharmacies provide a variety of products and services; not only selling prescription and scheduled over-the-counter medicines, but also playing an expanding role in the provision of related services such as medication management, and health education, information and advice.

The community pharmacy sector is subject to a high level of regulation, in particular ownership laws which limit the ownership of pharmacies and legislative frameworks for dealing with scheduled medicines, such as 'Pharmacy' (S2) and 'Pharmacist Only' (S3) medicines. These growing regulatory demands require training to target the specific required skills and knowledge.

Feedback from industry during the development of the Service Skills Australia Environmental Scan suggests that these challenges can be addressed within the industry by focusing on quality service, not price alone; specialising staff in different roles; lobbying for legislation to set limitations on discounts and to maintain prices; and screening potential staff members' language abilities.

1. Issues across the industry

1.1 Communication and customer services

Community pharmacies are faced with the increasing expectation from customers to provide relevant advice on health and well being services. The importance of the customer service interaction within a community pharmacy, along with the expected knowledge, cannot be underestimated. The growing diversity of Australian society has resulted in a need for businesses to ensure that their employees are fully skilled in customer service skills to adapt to a new set of expectations and demands, including cultural issues.

What skills are required to provide customers with quality customer service?

1.2 Technology

Changes in technology impact on the community pharmacy industry. They generate ongoing training and skill development for employees and facilitate what is recognised a major industry trend: the growth in online health services, including prescription services.

The internet is an especially popular source among younger Australians, with almost half of those aged 18—34 years seeking medical information online in the past year¹.

The introduction of e-prescriptions has also led to changes in the way in which pharmacists receive prescriptions, impacting upon the role of both the pharmacy assistant and dispensary assistant. The introduction of Mirixa (a compliance program which encourages customers to take their medicines as per their doctor's requirements) will also have an impact on pharmacy and dispensary assistants as they will have a role in organising the program and making appointments.

The ability to use changing technologies and software applications has been identified as a huge advantage, as it allows businesses to advertise to a wider audience relatively cheaply. Instant messaging and the ability to display photographs of new products also assist online sales. The online availability of product images also increases accountability for delivering products as shown.

How is changing technology impacting the community pharmacy industry relating to:

- **Provision of information to customers?**
- **Skills required from staff?**

¹ The Pharmacy Guild of Australia, Media Release, December 9 2009 "Community Pharmacy Serving a Need"

1.3 Health care areas

Community pharmacies are being required to play an increasing role in the maintenance of the health and well being areas. Factors including a growing and ageing population are playing a contributing role in this. The growth in population will lead to an increased demand for workers in the community pharmacy industry; staff efficiency and productivity gains will be required to service the growing number of customers. Industry consultation has shown that a growing population is seen as potentially being good for business, with an increase in sales. Pharmacies will become busier as the demand for doctors grows.

The implications of an ageing population will be the requirement of more pharmacists and staff to be trained in home health, wound care, sleep apnoea, disease management and diabetes. With a growing number of older people at home, pharmacy workers will also need to be able to assist customers with home health equipment and first aid. Stock changes will be required more frequently.

What skills are required by workers in the community pharmacy industry to deal with this increasing role in the maintenance of health and well being in customers?

1.4 Sustainability

One of the vital workforce development needs for the service industries is the requirement to adopt sustainable practices. As stated in the SSA Environmental Scan 2009, "Greater awareness of these issues and how they should be managed within enterprise needs to be incorporated into VET training. With consumers making more purchasing choices based upon sustainability issues, training in areas such as product knowledge, brand marketing and consumer information will need to be enhanced and updated."

The community pharmacy industry is one of high customer contact and therefore presents possibilities to build awareness. Many of the sustainable skill requirements for the community pharmacy industry relate to product knowledge, purchasing criteria and business practices as well as imparting sustainability consciousness onto customers. When a customer sees sustainable practice it raises the awareness of sustainable practice, engages customers and helps to change existing mindsets - of both customers and the workforce.

What are common ways to address sustainability in the community pharmacy industry?

Are there new skills that should be included in the training for Pharmacy assistants or dispensary assistants?

2. Evolving job roles in industry

2.1 Community Pharmacy Assistant and Dispensary Assistant

Community pharmacies are moving from being considered a ‘one-off’ service to a continuum of care. The breadth of service offered by these pharmacies has increased in recent years to health advice on drugs and medications as well as services for well-being. As a result, community pharmacy and dispensary assistants will need skill development in such things as medication management and health education to support these growing services. This need takes on greater significance when viewed in light of the federal government’s Preventative Health Strategy².

In addition to this, there is an increase in the delegation of responsibilities to community pharmacy and dispensary assistants under the Fourth Community Pharmacy Agreement and Quality Care Pharmacy Program, with the expectation of a further expanding role within the forthcoming Fifth Community Pharmacy Agreement.

Are there new skills required by a community pharmacy assistant?

Are there new skills required by a dispensary assistant?

2.2 Management

The community pharmacy industry often describes its workforce as a ‘two-tier’ workforce consisting of part-time and casual labour on the one hand and full-time labour characterised by experience, longevity and maturity on the other. The industry is also a labour-intensive one; its services are not as easily automated as those of other industries. Therefore, management skills incorporating motivation, conflict management, planning and team building are crucial to the industry for its continued growth and productivity.

Leaders and managers of small and medium businesses fulfil a wide range of roles requiring a variety of skills. The global financial crisis has highlighted the need for managers to have a greater knowledge and understanding of financial matters, technology, business planning and human resource management.

What skills are required by a pharmacist, in addition to a degree, to successfully manage a pharmacy?

² In September 2009, the Australian Federal Government (Department of Health and Ageing) released its Preventative Health Strategy that focuses on obesity, diabetes, mental health, tobacco and excessive consumption of alcohol. The strategy has seven key strategic directions and sets a number of ambitious targets, including halting and reversing the rise in the number of people that are overweight or obese, as well as engaging communities to inform, enable and support people to make healthy choices.