



## Pharmacy Month 2019 – Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hospital Pharmacy

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As an intern at Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hospital (MGMH) Pharmacy, I remember that Pharmacy Week 2007 was celebrated with great enthusiasm. This instilled in me a passion and devotion to this profession that has motivated me through the years. It is our opportunity to make added efforts to educate the public on our profession and pertinent medical topics. But it is, for me, a celebration, a reminder that we matter and that we can make a difference.

Twelve years later, back at MGMH, the excitement and enthusiasm is still there and so is the stress of challenging time constraints, trying to squeeze in activities on busy days! But it was all worth it!

After all, in the public sector, a patient's last stop is the pharmacy... after a long day at the hospital, the least we can do is lend an ear to their complaints and compliments, and say "Goodbye" with a smile and "See you next month". We have the power to end their day on a good note. Why? Because we care...

Having grown from Pharmacy Week to Pharmacy Month has helped us spread out activities and plan accordingly. With a whole month dedicated to the profession, this has motivated pharmacists to take action.

Our organising committee comprised our current interns and me, the coordinator. With Mental Health Awareness being our focus



MGMH interns

for the month, we planned activities that were valuable to both our patients and fellow professionals. Our generous pharmacy staff personally funded most of the activities. We are most grateful for everyone's contribution!

Pharmacy Month kicked off on 2 September 2019 with a staff tea to welcome the season of Spring and to start off on a positive note. It was a small celebration to kick-off the exciting days to come. Theme-related posters were displayed outside the pharmacy and various areas in the hospital.

On Friday, 6 November, our outpatient staff downed their pens for a short while, to serve the patients a meal, fruit and a beverage. Sponsored by the staff themselves, all were humbled by the gratitude shown by the patients. Beaming with smiles, the patients enjoyed a hot meal on a cold spring day.



Spring Day tea to welcome the start of Pharmacy Month

On Saturday, we held our annual paediatric ward party. A few of us took some personal time to spend with the children admitted over the weekend and their concerned moms. From past experiences, I've learnt that every child loves a balloon! Thanks to our assistants, learners and pharmacy students who made some time during the week to blow up balloons and package snack packs for the children. We split up into two teams, one distributing balloons and



#### Friday dress code

snack packs to the kids and their moms and the other getting the activity area ready.

We wanted to share in the celebration of Pharmacy Month and decided to have a little party area with snacks and refreshments. We invited some of the children to come and colour with us. The music got little heads bobbing and arms moving, especially "Baby Shark". There were beautiful smiles all around and we were grateful to bring a few hours of happiness to what would have been a sad and scary hospital-stay.

We addressed the mothers on stress management and the benefits of talking to friends and professionals about their problems. They all emphatically agreed that, as mothers, they tend to disregard their own feelings for the sake of moving on and caring for their families, but many times experience a "burn-out". Without expecting to, we addressed our first group on the importance of Mental Health Awareness. What started off as a simple party for kids turned into a show of support for hard working moms who sometimes tend to neglect their own mental and emotional health.

Week 2 was our outreach week. On Monday we visited Natest Primary School, to award the pre-schoolers for their Spring Day colouring efforts and to teach them about general hygiene.

On Wednesday, our interns visited Durban and Coastal Mental Health Centre in Phoenix where they treated the staff to tea and a talk on work stress management and donated groceries for the residents. They were taken on a tour of the facility and shown how patients with mental disabilities are trained and given opportunities to join the workforce. This was certainly a mutually rewarding experience.

Thursday saw us visiting the local mall where, with the assistance of one of our nurses, we offered free blood pressure and blood glucose testing. With about 30 participants, we chatted to patients about various chronic diseases, healthy lifestyle practices and mental health awareness.



The MGMH Pharmacy family

Friday was our hospital sports day and pharmacy's reason to have a braai. Yes, many pharmacy staff participated in the sporting events ... And the braai! A wonderfully fun day!

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in September, the interns addressed patients at the hospital on various mental health-related topics such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, stress management and coping with a loved one with a mental illness. The talks were given in both English and isiZulu and the patients were asked related questions and given prizes for correct answers.

During the last week, I gave the staff some simple lessons and activities related to stress and its management. Colour therapy, bubble-wrap popping, cloudy jar symbolism and marbles were some of the stress relieving reminders. Our inpatient pharmacy department drew up a list of psychoactive drug trade and generic names that was displayed in the wards for easy reference.

Puzzles and games were played in pharmacy by the staff during the month such as crosswords, word searches, drug groups and pharmacy bingo. We also had some themed dress-codes for certain days.

On 30 September, prizes were awarded to winners of the game challenges and in recognition of the best dressed for the themed days.

It was indeed a well spent month with the focus on the patient and the medical professional. The focus was inside and out... within pharmacy and outside with the patients. Mental health is a topic that pharmacists do not discuss in detail with patients. We may be able to advise on their medications or assist with referring

to another practitioner. We need to be supportive and act within our scope. Advise and refer. But another important message was that as healthcare professionals it is imperative to take care of our own mental health so that we can offer the best possible care to our patients.



UKZN Pharmacy students lend a helping hand