

Fiona Corbin – pha

BY JENNY MCELROY

Fiona Corbin works as a pharmacist facilitator for the Whanganui Regional Primary Health Organisation (WRPHO) – a role which now combines aspects of influencing prescriber behaviour, seeing individual patients for medication reviews and leading the DHBNZ Performance Management Programme in her region.

Despite, having experience at all these levels, it has been the work with individual patients as part of the health care team which Fiona says she sees as the most efficient way of creating change towards best practice. "Even though the health system has been re-oriented to address health from a population perspective, general practitioners (GPs), nurses and pharmacists still deal with patients

on a case by case basis. When I suggest a patient makes a specific evidence-based change which really benefits them, other members of the multi-disciplinary team such as the doctors, nurses and kaiawhina (community health workers) also learn how best to use the drugs. This is a far more powerful method of influencing behaviour than when prescribers look at prescribing patterns showing how drugs are used across a population," Fiona said.

Previously Fiona completed her internship, worked as a pharmacist and eventually bought shares in Wickstead Pharmacy with John Dunlop in Wanganui. Fiona said John had influenced the direction she chose within pharmacy with his clinical and patient focused approach. Fiona completed CPC™ (Comprehensive Pharmaceutical Care) training and began doing medication reviews from Wickstead Pharmacy. She enjoyed seeing patients as she soon began to feel it was the area where she could make

I feel affirmed and useful in my role

the biggest difference.

Having worked for around 12 years in the dispensing environment, Fiona experienced numerous difficult situations. There was one particular month when a 15 cent part charge was placed on 15 Solprin tablets as a result of PHARMAC subsidy changes. This meant many of her patients needed to pay \$3.15 instead of the usual \$3.00 they were used to paying for those prescriptions.

"It made me realise as a dispensing pharmacist you have such a small window of opportunity when giving medication to your patient to use your knowledge and expertise to help people get the best out of their medication. Instead I often found myself using that time to explain why these new charges existed and continually felt disheartened, anxious and negative. It occurred to me that this was really dumb."

Despite trying new approaches such as changing the dispensary work flow to address the issue, Fiona felt in a busy dispensary there still remained a huge amount of compliance paperwork and prescription preparation which was keeping her away from the patients and the work she loved.

Having sold her pharmacy in 2002, Fiona spent some time preparing a proposal to the Whanganui District Health Board for a pharmacist facilitator for the region which was accepted. Her previous experience with medication use reviews meant she had a link back into the health care team via the patient and she approached the role with both a patient and a prescriber focus. This differed from many other pharmacist facilitator roles at the time which were primarily working with a prescriber focus to address medicines management issues.

Fiona has since worked on contract in the role which she believes has allowed her to develop professionally and permitted her to make a difference to how people actually use their medicines, more so than was possible



Pharmacist facilitator

when she was dispensing them from her busy pharmacy.

Clinical pharmacist John Dunlop said from the first day of her internship Fiona impressed him with the use of her considerable intellect and drive to understand as much as possible about the practice of pharmacy.

"Fiona embraced the concept of CPC™ with enthusiasm and vigor building on existing relationships with the doctors, and working collaboratively with them for her patients. She regularly attended their clinical meetings and ultimately facilitated clinical sessions, so it wasn't surprising they encouraged her to negotiate a permanent position with their PHO, funded by the DHB. That she managed to organise her way through this bureaucracy is testament to Fiona's organisational and leadership abilities", Mr Dunlop said.

Fiona completed a Masters in Clinical Pharmacy by distance learning through Otago University in 1997 as well as a Post Graduate Certificate endorsed in Medicines Management in 2004. Fiona also completed two years in the Auckland University School of Pharmacy Doctor of Pharmacy programme before she became unwell. "Ongoing post graduate education is critically important for all health professionals' development given the rapid pace of change in the environment in which we practice. This ideal was also instilled in me as an intern by my preceptor, John Dunlop."

Because of her experience with facilitation and pharmaceuticals management, Fiona was also asked to lead the Performance Management Programme project for the WRPHO. This is a quality programme for PHO's established by DHBNZ to measure how well PHOs are doing in a number of population-based health related indicators.

Fiona ... lead the Performance Management Programme project for the WRPHO

In the past five years Fiona has also had the experience of being a health consumer as she was unwell for a period and became a user in the health system having to take a lot of different medicines.

"With the perspective of hindsight I can now see how getting your medicine dispensed is often the easy part. When you get home and something doesn't go quite right, is the time when you need the input and, by and large, pharmacy input is not there then. As a pharmacist facilitator visiting patients in their own homes often with another health worker who may have made the referral, I now feel affirmed and useful in my role, and I feel what I am doing really does make a difference," Fiona said.

And, as John Dunlop concluded, the future of our profession may well depend on young committed pharmacy leaders such as Fiona Corbin.

