

The Gastroenterology Support Technician: Using Opportunities to Develop Technician Skills and Support Patient Care

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Background

There has been steady growth in the quantity and range of biologic therapies used chronically in the area of gastroenterology. Additionally, since 2016 direct-acting antiviral therapies (DAAs) for hepatitis C treatment have become a significant cost to hospital budgets.

Description

Dedicated resources were required to ensure quality use of medicines in these growth areas ensuring that use met both hospital formulary and/or Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) requirements. Biologic therapies also required additional scrutiny due to routine use of compassionately funded medicines.

Patients with Inflammatory bowel disease were a particular area of interest as this population had increasing and chronic use of hospital based biologic treatments.

Due to the high cost of the therapies there was an opportunity for a technician to provide oversight to prevent revenue loss through stock wastage or incorrect PBS claiming.

Action

In 2017 a self-funding gastroenterology pharmacy support team including a senior pharmacist and gastroenterology support technician (GAST) was established at Eastern Health.

Initially the senior pharmacist established routine tasks and responsibilities within the team and provided training to the GAST to support them in their role. GAST responsibilities are outlined in Figure 1.

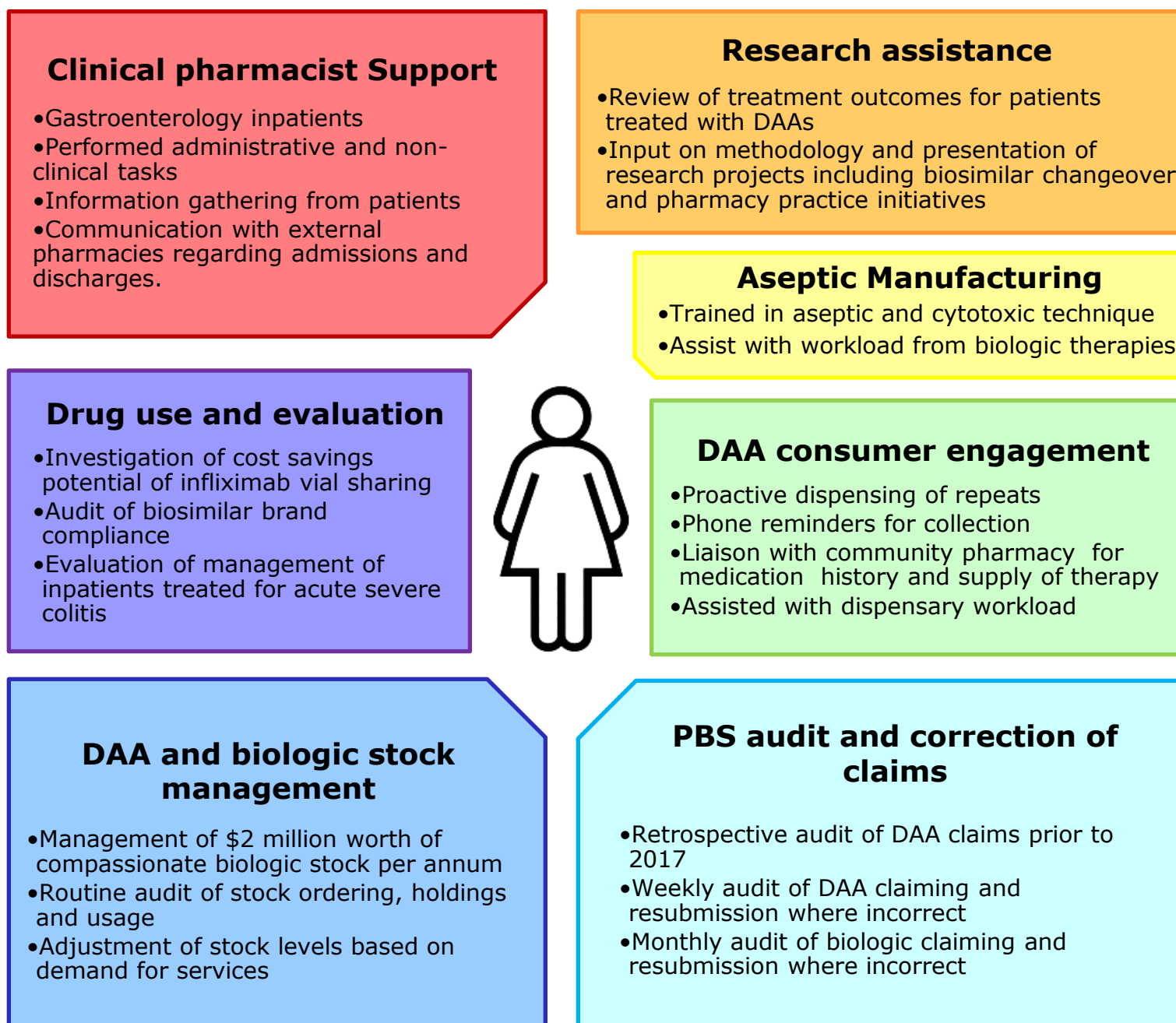


Figure 1. Key responsibilities of the gastroenterology support technician

Evaluation

After two years the GAST role has been self-funding through two functions. (Figure 2.)

- Audit and resubmission of incorrect PBS claims
- Enhancing DAA consumer engagement.

The GAST role was reduced from 1 Equivalent Full Time (EFT) to 0.5 EFT after one year due to reducing numbers of patients commencing on DAA therapy, in line with national trends.

The GAST role received positive feedback from the technicians that worked within its scope over the last 2 years. (See quoted text)

Activity	17/18 FY income	18/19 FY income
DAA therapy re-claiming	\$199,000	\$13,400
Biologic therapy re-claiming	\$16,600	\$21,000
DAA patient retention	\$261,000	\$75,000
Technician cost	-\$82,600 (1 EFT)	-\$44,600 (0.5 EFT)
Net Balance	\$394,000	\$64,800

Figure 2. Income retention or generation activities for the 17/18, 18/19 financial years (FY)

Implications for Practice

Identifying an expanding area with associated funding opportunities has allowed the new role to be sustainable while providing additional value to pharmacy services and patients.

Areas with high cost therapies, complex dosing regimens and compassionate stock use require higher scrutiny to reduce errors or wastage and to protect revenue. This oversight can be provided by a suitably trained technician.

Over two years, three different technicians have performed in the GAST role. Under supervision of a senior pharmacist these technicians have expanded their skill sets engaging with the pharmacy department in new ways including clinical support, quality use of medicine audits and research.

“It would be great to see these roles developed as a way for continuing education and development of pharmacy technicians”

“It was an incredible chance to interact with patients and nursing staff on a different level than technicians are able to in usual practice”

“The role provided me opportunities to utilise my skillset in clinical and research areas which are not currently accessible to pharmacy technicians in Australia ”

“The research component allowed me to utilise my skills in critical thinking, and data analysis. It gave me freedom to adjust workflows as the role evolved”

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