### The Gastroenterology Support Technician: Using Opportunities to Develop Technician Skills and Support Patient Care Geoffrey Haar<sup>1</sup>, Lauren Pollock<sup>2</sup>, Loan Huynh<sup>3</sup>

- 1. Senior Gastroenterology Pharmacist,
- 2. Gastroenterology Support Technician (Previous)
- 3. Gastroenterology Support Technician
- Pharmacy Department, Eastern Health, Melbourne, Australia

#### **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.

"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"

#### **Clinical pharmacist Support**

- Gastroenterology inpatients
- Performed administrative and nonclinical tasks
- Information gathering from patients
- Communication with external pharmacies regarding admissions and discharges.

## Research assistance

- Review of treatment outcomes for patients treated with DAAs
- Input on methodology and presentation of research projects including biosimilar changeover and pharmacy practice initiatives

### **Aseptic Manufacturing**

- Trained in aseptic and cytotoxic technique
- Assist with workload from biologic therapies

### **Drug use and evaluation**

- Investigation of cost savings potential of infliximab vial sharing
- Audit of biosimilar brand compliance
- Evaluation of management of inpatients treated for acute severe colitis



#### DAA consumer engagement

- Proactive dispensing of repeats
- Phone reminders for collection
- •Liaison with community pharmacy for medication history and supply of therapy
- Assisted with dispensary workload

#### **DAA** and biologic stock management

- Management of \$2 million worth of compassionate biologic stock per annum
- Routine audit of stock ordering, holdings and usage
- Adjustment of stock levels based on demand for services

# PBS audit and correction of

- Retrospective audit of DAA claims prior to 2017
- resubmission where incorrect

Figure 1. Key responsibilities of the gastroenterology support technician

#### **Evaluation**

After two years the GAST role has been selffunding 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<br>(1 EFT) | -\$44,600 (0.5<br>EFT) |
| Net Balance                  | \$394,000            | \$64,800               |

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

## claims

- Weekly audit of DAA claiming and resubmission where incorrect
- Monthly audit of biologic claiming and

#### **Implications for Practice**

Identifying an expanding 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"

Members of the Eastern Health Pharmacy Practice Research Group for abstract and poster review.

Pharmacy Department and Department of Gastroenterology Eastern Health.

#### Contact

Geoffrey Haar, Senior Gastroenterology Pharmacist, Eastern Health, Victoria.

Geoffrey.haar@easternhealth.org.au