

Mary Seacole Community Pharmacy case study – Mary Oaiya (London)

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Mary Oaiya is one of three main pharmacists at Boots in Chelmer Village Retail Park, Chelmsford, Essex.

During a yearly review, Mary, who has been with Boots for seven years, was advised to enrol on a leadership programme as part of her professional development.

“A colleague told me about the Mary Seacole programme and I was specifically interested in training through the NHS to widen my professional experience,” said Mary.

“I thought the programme would just cover a few leadership techniques, but there was much more to it. I learnt how to work with my team in a way that benefitted them and our patients, as well as working with other stakeholders within our working environment.

The programme gave me a greater understanding of my team, how I work as a leader and how I can best utilise my skills.

It enabled me to give greater feedback and improve the way I listen and interact with individuals - both patients and colleagues. I’ve gained insight into what I do every day and I can step back and reflect.

For instance, when sharing a vision with the team, I can now see how important it is that each person understands and is able to give input into any changes that might be needed.

I have more awareness of the complexity of people and how much more they have to offer than the skills on their CVs. There are so many more things that come into play – a person’s character and social circumstances – that can affect how they perform at work on any day during any task.”

The programme gave Mary the skills she needed to communicate and liaise better with her team, patients and stakeholders, giving individualised coaching and effective, continuous two-way feedback.

For instance, box ticking exercises have been expanded to incorporate deeper individual feedback, when taking on board ideas and suggestions for improving practice and services from both staff and patients.

For Mary, stepping out of the culture of Boots and working with different people through the NHS was useful in itself. She was able to get a broader perspective and look at things differently.

“Studying on the programme while doing a full-time job could prove challenging sometimes. I had to juggle things and make sure the programme leaders were aware of any problems so they could provide support if necessary.

Networking through face to face meetings and the online forum was a very positive part of the programme. It was really useful to meet people with different ideas from a variety of organisations. We were able to support each other and share ideas, which we are still doing.

It gave me a broader understanding of why my organisation did things in certain ways. That insight is very helpful when responding to change. I can now understand why various companies do what they do, and why choices are made, depending on the pressures and environmental changes.”

Mary has also gained vital negotiating tools which empower her to resolve conflict and face challenge more clearly. It has given her the confidence to have more of a dialogue in meetings and to offer up her own ideas. In other words, she has the tools to negotiate and influence.

“The programme has given me the confidence to continue my professional development and go forward with new projects. For instance, I am now looking at working more closely with GP surgeries, to engage directly with local practices,” said Mary.

“I would urge anyone to do the Mary Seacole programme. It’s hard work and you need to be committed. But it is absolutely worth it. It will change you for the better. There is so much to be gained.”