

AJP interview with Sandra Minas and Sheshtyn Paola (published 14/8/2020)

AJP: Thank you so much for your time today, Sandra.

SM: My pleasure. Thank you for having me.

AJP: So you are a clinical pharmacist at Alfred Health in Melbourne?

SM: Yes, I completed my internship last year. So this is my first year as a fully fledged pharmacist.

AJP: And you did your internship at Alfred Health as well?

SM: Yes, that's right.

AJP: And how have things changed for you in that transition between your internship and becoming a fully fledged pharmacist?

SM: I think I guess transitioning from an intern to a pharmacist in any case is always an intimidating step to take, especially at the beginning without any safety net to fall back on as such, but it has taken some time to adjust to, but I feel as though those extra responsibilities that you have that comes with I guess being a pharmacist are now starting to be second nature.

So I've actually worked across multiple areas of the hospital for the past several months including medicines information, emergency – which I currently work here and there, as well as COVID ward areas and outpatient.

Currently I'm overseeing and coordinating our outpatients' postal area which has been brought about due to the COVID-19 pandemic and this is dedicated to ensuring that our high-risk outpatients that may actually be immunocompromised are able to receive their medication safely without coming into hospital, so it essentially allows these patients to be safe number one, stay home while still having access to their essential medications during this time.

AJP: How would you describe your experience you said working on COVID ward?

SM: It's something that you don't know what to expect going into. There are pharmacists that do that every single day and I take my hat off to them because it's definitely an extremely challenging and confronting experience. My little time spent there I felt as though although things were quite different in regards to being able to speak to patients, to having to second guess or think twice before you know going to a patient's bedside to think 'oh, are they confirmed COVID-19 or am I able to walk into this patient's room?'

AJP: So I guess that leads to my next question, which is how have things changed since the COVID pandemic has hit? Has that changed the way that things run in the hospital?

SM: It's a good question. The short answer is yes, definitely. Over the last several months working in the hospital, it's been quite rewarding experience given the current circumstances and looking back at the start of the year, obviously not knowing what it would bring, I can safely say that I've faced and overcome many unexpected challenges. In general, the hospital environment is very different. It's been obviously really important for us as healthcare workers to stay safe while still providing the care that's needed for our patients. Various teams have actually been separated to minimise movement and contact but within our department and within the teams but also with patients and I guess our general processes have changed to ensure that we minimise the spread of COVID-19 as much as possible.

AJP: Yeah. So, in addition to splitting teams has there been a focus on personal protective equipment being used to minimise the risk to hospital pharmacists?

SM: PPE is being used. The whole hospital. I haven't worked in all the areas, but yeah, most of the areas at least have the basic PPE equipment and obviously higher risk areas have complete PPE available. There's a lot of procedures that have come in place and a lot of communication from various different seniors within both the pharmacy department, but also across the hospital to ensure that we're all safe while we're working.

AJP: And has the pandemic affected the general feeling and the environment in the office? How has it been affecting your team?

SM: At the beginning of the pandemic, it was important to determine what it is that we need to do in order to be best prepared for unfortunately the worst case scenario. And how we were able to achieve that. It's also been about being adaptable and flexible and being able to modify the roles of pharmacists in order to provide care where it's needed. Pharmacists in general, I think have stepped up and increased their scope of practice in this time. We at Alfred Health also have now overnight pharmacists. Usually within the hospital environment we have a strong sense of teamwork and I think I can safely say that teamwork has taken on a new meaning and obviously with the inability to all physically work together safely in order to maintain the sense of teamwork we've had to adapt and use different means of communication and technology. Obviously, such as video calls like this one. And I think although there has been a lot of uncertainty, the pandemic has also brought about a lot of opportunity and the opportunity for leadership, so

I feel I have been able to step up and to do even more within my current role, which is extremely rewarding. One of the best parts of working in the hospital environment over the past several months has also been the facts that now more so than ever, we're all realising that we're able to provide an essential service and essential care to patients when they really do need it the most.

AJP: Thank you so much Sandra for your time. I really appreciate it.

SM: Thank you, Sheshtyn.