

A day in the life...

Meet pharmacist **Olutayo Arikawe**, 46, Director of Swinford Pharmacy in Stourbridge...

INTERVIEW **JANE YETTRAM**

🕒 8am

I jump into a taxi and leave for work. I've been a pharmacist for 23 years and decided on this career because I love helping people achieve good health and a good quality of life.

I use this travelling time – anything from 20 minutes to 45 minutes depending on the traffic – to reply to emails, read newspapers and see what's happening all over the world.

🕒 8.25am

I am not really a breakfast person, but I'm definitely a coffee person! So I get a coffee from the lovely place next door to the pharmacy. I always arrive before we open at nine, because I like to be well prepared for the patients coming through the door.

Community pharmacists are such an important part of the NHS. We are the most accessible of all health professionals. Everyone has a pharmacy fairly close by, and you don't need an appointment to see a pharmacist. We provide services that people often can't get from their GP, because of long queues on the phone or long waiting times for appointments.

🕒 9am

From the moment we open, all the staff are busy. Our whole team is crucial to the services we provide – not just the pharmacist. We all make sure we greet everyone in a friendly way. People coming

into the pharmacy are often going through a great deal, and sometimes the only smiling faces they see are ours.

All the staff are excellent – our medicine counter assistant, Helen Tromans, even won the Medicine Counter Assistant of the Year award.

🕒 10am

A man comes in to have his blood pressure checked. This is part of the NHS's hypertension case-finding service, which provides checks for those over 40. If someone has a reading above 140/90 we fit them with an ambulatory blood pressure monitor. Then, depending on the results, we refer them to the GP so they can get the correct medication.

Recently, one lady came in to buy paracetamol because she had a headache. She was about to drive four hours to see her son. But, because of the headache, I checked her blood pressure. It was so high, I referred her straight to A&E. Preventative medicine like this is really important.

Similarly, helping people stop smoking prevents serious health problems. We used to offer weekly support, monitoring people's carbon monoxide levels, but sadly that's no longer funded in my area. We do, though, advise on products that help people give up, and provide encouragement. I'm also planning to set up a private smoking cessation service, helping people cope with withdrawal symptoms.



Olutayo's team, including award-winning assistant Helen (front left)

Pharmacists really are a gateway to healthcare – we offer so much

🕒 11.30am

A woman wants to talk in private, so I show her into our consultation room. Privacy – and reassuring people that you're happy to help – is important. She tells me she has the symptoms of cystitis but can't get a GP appointment. Luckily our pharmacy can prescribe antibiotics for urinary tract infections. I'll call her in a week's time to see how she's doing. People are always so grateful when we help them like this. It touches my heart.

I hope that the Government's proposal for pharmacists to be able to prescribe a wider range of medication comes to fruition, because there's so much more we could be doing.

🕒 12 noon

Patients are arriving for their flu jabs. We've also had lots of people coming in with cold symptoms today. Of course, the things we see are seasonal – in the spring and summer everybody comes in about hay fever!



Olutayo Arikawe

🕒 1pm

I stop for lunch at my desk – I usually order something from the coffee shop next door.

Of course we're open throughout lunchtime. Even during the pandemic we didn't shut for a single day. We provided lots of tests, ran a vaccination clinic and helped establish three other local vaccination centres. Plus, we went out to schools, colleges, churches and so on to provide Covid testing in the community.

🕒 2pm

An older gentleman comes in to collect his regular prescription. He has sight problems and finds the small print on labels hard to read. We have a note on our system and always adjust the settings on our computer to print his labels in large type.

We've known this gentleman for years. We have a lot of regulars, and nurturing relationships helps us care for them.

We get to know whole generations – grandma, mum, daughter... It builds trust, helps them feel they can talk to us about anything, that we're there to listen. The art of listening is crucial for a pharmacist.

Over the years, I've been lucky enough to win some awards, including Community Pharmacist of the Year. But I was really touched to receive the 'I Love My Pharmacist' award, as it depended on votes from patients and the public.

🕒 3.30pm

I check through a batch of prescriptions. Nowadays we have issues with medication being out of stock. Sometimes a medication comes back in stock for a very short window – literally 10 minutes. So I continually check availability with manufacturers so I don't miss that slot. For example, HRT like Utrogestan or Oestrogel are frequently unavailable.

🕒 4.30pm

Our driver heads off on yet another run. He delivers prescriptions to those who are housebound, and collects unused medication. He does lots of deliveries – he's busy all day. We pay for this ourselves. It's not funded by the NHS or the GP, so we have to limit it to those who really need it. If pharmacists were better funded we could do more of this as well as offer other services.

🕒 6pm

We finally close the door. It's been very busy all day – as usual! Pharmacists really are a gateway to healthcare. As well as advice and reassurance, we offer so much – from ear wax removal to blood tests checking liver function, iron levels or glucose levels.

🕒 7pm

My working day ends and I head home. Although the pharmacy closed an hour ago, some jobs are better done when it's quiet. So I've called back one lady who simply needs to have a chat and I've finished up on paperwork.

🕒 8pm

Rice and vegetables for dinner with my husband. I like to relax in the evening and not think about work, focusing instead on my family and catching up with friends.

🕒 10pm

Time for bed to get a good night's sleep before work tomorrow. Being a pharmacist is so important to me – and it can literally be life-saving. A while ago, a man came in looking for some cream for patches on his skin. I knew something was wrong and referred him straight to his GP. A couple of months later he came back in. As I suspected, it was skin cancer – and he was so thankful that I insisted he see a doctor.

Looking for a great speaker?

Community pharmacists can give talks to local Townswomen's Guilds. To find out more, contact the National Pharmacy Association at s.fishwick@npa.co.uk or call 07920 494081.