



Diabetes Care – Helping Pharmacy Grow

Diabetes affects nearly a quarter of a million patients in Ireland. Experts believe tens of thousands of those may not even realise that they have the condition. As time goes on and pressure mounts on hospitals and GP services, there is an opportunity for growth in the diabetes care services provided by community pharmacists and their teams.

Micheál McVann is a pharmacist at McVann's CarePlus Pharmacy on Shop Street in Westport, County Mayo. He is one of a growing number of pharmacists in Ireland - including other CarePlus Pharmacy teams in Headford, Dunboyne and Loughrea - offering HbA1c testing for diabetes. More effective than the usual finger-prick test, this measures a person's blood sugar levels over a 12 week period and is highly accurate at detecting a possible diabetes diagnosis. It takes about 6 minutes to carry out in the pharmacy.

More often performed by a GP or clinical diabetes care team, the HbA1c test has allowed Micheál to detect a growing number of potential cases of diabetes, who are then referred to their doctor for further testing and care.

Micheál says providing this test to customers is a good move for a community pharmacist: "To me, this is the future of pharmacy - offering more services for more conditions, as much as we can. It builds the relationship with our customers and cements our place in the community as a trusted source of healthcare and information. It also aligns with

CarePlus Pharmacy's stated goal of empowering people to live healthier and happier lives."

The CarePlus Pharmacy network last year launched a drive to help customers living with diabetes, providing an information pack for people when they collected their monthly prescription containing lots of advice on managing the condition, as well as information on Diabetes Ireland services. The pharmacy group also worked with Diabetes Ireland to educate pharmacy teams about diabetes to allow them to provide the most up-to-date advice to customers. Other branches of CarePlus Pharmacy, such as that in Carrigaline, County Cork, have even begun providing retina screening, which can be vital for diabetes patients.

Thanks to expert training and the CarePlus Pharmacy awareness campaigns, Micheál McVann and his team are always on the lookout for customers who may be displaying common symptoms of diabetes in its various forms.

He has outlined some of the key indicators that someone may display if they have undiagnosed diabetes: "Thirst is a big one, and frequent urination. Dry skin, fatigue

Micheál McVann, pharmacist,
McVann's CarePlus Pharmacy



and unexplained weight loss. The nerve problems associated with diabetes can also cause tingling in the hands and feet, while blurred vision, frequent infections and sores on the skin that are slow to heal would all be symptoms that would make me advise them to consider getting checked."

The team at McVann's CarePlus Pharmacy provides all diabetes patients with a blood sugar monitor so they can do their regular finger-prick tests and monitor their readings. Just as education among pharmacy staff is important for proper diabetic care, it's also vital that patients know how the condition affects them and how to manage it. "We work hard to ensure our diabetes patients understand their medication, especially for those newly-diagnosed - as it can be a lot to take in. Sometimes, they won't check their sugars regularly

or they won't do it correctly, so we can help with that. Dietary advice is vitally important too because a good diet supports the medication they are on and ensures they will get the full benefit of the medical help."

Micheál believes that diabetes care is a really important sector within retail pharmacy and is only going to grow: "Pharmacies are ideally positioned to help people with diabetes support and care. The outlets' accessibility on the high street means they can get expert advice in private from a pharmacist immediately. Increasingly, people are having to wait days for doctors' appointments - and months for non-urgent hospital appointments - so if we can fill that gap with appropriate care and treatment, then it's a win-win for customers and the pharmacy. When you consider the tens of thousands of people who are going to need care in the future, we provide a really valuable opportunity to relieve some of the pressure on the wider healthcare system."

