Pharmacist Prescribing – Frequently Asked Questions

1) What does a Pharmacist Prescriber do?
A Pharmacist Prescriber will work with other healthcare professionals in a collaborative team environment to optimise medicines-related health outcomes for individuals and populations. Their work includes using their unique knowledge, understanding and skills to provide individualised medicines management services, including prescribing medicines, to patients across a range of healthcare settings.

Based on the diagnosis of a medical practitioner, and depending on the clinical needs of the patient, a Pharmacist Prescriber can:
- assess the effectiveness of a patient’s current medicines
- review and interprets test results
- make a prescribing decision to
  - modify the dosage of an existing medicine
  - initiate a new medicine
  - discontinue an unnecessary medicine.

2) How does a pharmacist gain prescribing rights?
In order to prescribe medicines, a pharmacist must:
- have a postgraduate Diploma in Clinical Pharmacy or equivalent as a pre-requisite qualification for entry into the Pharmacist Prescriber course
- undertake the Postgraduate Prescribing Certificate
- work in a collaborative health team environment

3) What does the Pharmacy Prescribing postgraduate course involve?
The Postgraduate Prescribing Certificate is equivalent to 600 hours of study and comprises two 30-point courses: ‘Principles of Prescribing’ and ‘Prescribing Practicum’.

‘Principles of Prescribing’ consists of web-based learning, audio conferences and face-to-face workshops. Topics include legal and ethical aspects of prescribing, consultation skills, clinical assessment skills, patient monitoring, clinical decision making, prescribing safely and effectively.

The practicum involves learning through experience in prescribing at the student’s workplace and requires the student to work for at least 150 hours under the supervision of a designated medical practitioner (DMP).

Students then undergo a final clinical examination – a simulated patient scenario to test their prescribing skills, and an oral interview to examine their experiences and development as a trainee prescriber. After completing the course students should be able to:
- understand the responsibilities of the pharmacist prescriber
- undertake a relevant clinical examination
- use and interpret basic diagnostic aids
- formulate a treatment plan
- recognise, critically evaluate and respond to influences on prescribing practice
- demonstrate an understanding of public health issues related to medicines
- demonstrate an understanding of the legal, ethical and professional framework for accountability and responsibility relating to prescribing.
4) **How is the Designated Medical Practitioner selected for a student’s practicum? What is their role?**

The Designated Medical Practitioner (DMP) is nominated by the student and approved by the course provider.

DMPs are provided with extensive information on their roles and must agree with their student’s learning plan which sets out the goals and activities for the student during the 150 hours of supervised practice. The area of practice must be limited up to three conditions and the list of drugs that the student can prescribe is restricted to about 25 medicines.

The DMP will help their student to determine their particular learning needs, for example the relevant diagnostic tests and procedures for that particular area and the range of medicines they will need to prescribe. The DMP will provide training and supervise student activities such as patient consultation under observation, practise of physical assessment skills, generation of treatment options, generation of prescriptions or drug chart entries, documentation, communication with patients and other healthcare professionals.

Throughout the practicum, the DMP is required to provide feedback and undertake a number of evaluations of the student’s activities. In addition, students are also required to have several peer review assessments which involve both the DMP and a number of colleagues such as medical and nursing colleagues.

5) **What universities offer the Postgraduate Prescribing Certificate?**

The certificate is offered by the Pharmacy Schools at the Universities of Auckland and Otago.

6) **What are some example areas of prescribing practice?**

Potential areas of prescribing practice include:
- Overall drug therapy management for diabetes
- Management of those with cardiovascular risk if medically stable
- Hypertension
- Gout
- Care of older patients with complex needs on multiple medicines
- Palliative care
- Acute pain in the emergency care setting
- Warfarin management for medical inpatients and in the community
- Paediatrics and neonates
- Intravenous to oral antibiotics switch.
- Total parental nutrition.

7) **How wide a range of medicines will pharmacists be able to prescribe?**

Pharmacists who have completed the appropriate training will be able to prescribe a range of medicines in their area of practice as agreed by the collaborative health team in which they work.

8) **What are some of the clinical examination procedures and diagnostic tests that Pharmacist Prescribers are expected to be able to use?**

Pharmacist Prescribers are required to have working knowledge of the clinical examination procedures and diagnostic tests that are used in their clinical area. Some of these procedures will be carried out by the Pharmacist Prescriber and some by other healthcare professionals in their team. It is expected that Pharmacist Prescribers understand the procedures that their patients undergo and know the meaning of the test results.
Aspects of testing may include:

- measuring ‘normal’ heart and lungs function and recognising ‘abnormal’ respiratory sounds, using a stethoscope
- using the cardiovascular assessment tool
- measuring the respiratory rate
- administering the treadmill/exercise tolerance test
- using spirometry results to assess lung function
- understanding chest x-ray results
- interpreting blood test results
- understanding urine test results
- understanding CT scan reports.

9) **Will patients be able to consult a pharmacist directly to obtain a prescription instead of seeing a GP?**

No. A criterion for registration as a pharmacist prescriber is that they are a member of a collaborative health care team. Pharmacists who have undertaken the advanced training will work with a designated medical practitioner who acts as a mentor and provides advice in the team environment. Diagnosis and wider patient management remains the role of the medical practitioner.

10) **Is there a potential conflict of interest for community pharmacists who can prescribe in their own business?**

No. The scope for a pharmacist prescriber specifies that Pharmacist Prescribers must ensure a separation of prescribing and dispensing and must not dispense prescriptions written by them. The Ministry of Health monitors prescriber interests in pharmacies through the annual licensing of pharmacies. The annual licensing regime includes a question about prescriber interest and ownership of the pharmacy. If there are prescriber interests, conditions can be placed on the licence to prohibit dispensing of prescriptions by the prescriber. The licence can also be refused.

11) **Will most pharmacists expect to have prescribing powers in the future?**

The number of pharmacist prescribers is expected to be relatively small, restricted to those working in specialist positions in hospital or primary care teams.

12) **Is this a service that is already provided by other professionals?**

The pharmacist prescriber role is seen as a natural extension of the experienced clinical pharmacist’s role, using their extensive training and knowledge of medicines and their management.

Further developing the skills of all those within multi-disciplinary teams of health professionals, including prescribing pharmacists and nurse practitioners (where applicable), is consistent with the Government’s commitment to utilise all health practitioners to their full capability and improve access to integrated health services for patients.

The expectation is that all members of the team will work together, making best use of the particular skills each health professional brings, to contribute to the overall care of the patient.

13) **What is a designated prescriber under the Medicines Act 1981?**

A designated prescriber may only prescribe a prescription medicine if:

(a) the prescription medicine is of a class or description that the designated prescriber is authorised to prescribe by regulations made under the Act; and

(b) the requirements specified in or imposed under those regulations are satisfied.