

CATRIONA SINCLAIR

SIZE 7

Audio Producer: Robbie MacInnes

My name is Catriona Sinclair, I'm a community pharmacist. I work in Brora in the Scottish Highlands and I've been here for six years. I've been a community pharmacist for twenty five years.

Brora is a very rural Highland Village, halfway between Inverness and John O 'Groats. people doing John O 'Groats to Land's End do actually walk past the front door which is good for blister plasters, but it's certainly a remote area in that we're sixty miles from the nearest hospital if you like, well, major hospital. You're almost in a bit of a time-warp. You hear about people going to A&E for everything, whereas up here there is no option to go to A&E so people do come to the pharmacy a lot for minor ailments, and in some ways the beauty of the job is the fact I don't know at quarter to nine when I open the door, I don't know what the day holds because you don't know who's coming through the door.

People come in and they know your name. They know you, the rapport you get with your patients makes the job satisfying, more enjoyable. People come in just for the chat as well. They don't just come in because they're unwell. When I came here there was people who just had babies and now I'm seeing them a school and you're going through different stages of their life with them and their family and that allows you I think to get some deal of pride and satisfaction from what you're doing. You get excited with the little things. If someone comes in and you find out that what you thought was wrong with them, was wrong with them, or what you gave them the doctor said 'yeah that's great'. Giving advice to someone about their eyes last week and they went to see an eye consultant and the consultant said 'what have you been doing?' and they said, 'the pharmacist said I was to wash them out with some cold water from the kettle every hour for a couple of days'. 'Great advice!' he says - and they came back in to tell me and I was just like that's fine, my day is complete now. You know, it's your little victories like that, that just reinforce that what you're doing is worthwhile. These little victories, that's all that matters.

I'm a bit of a study geek so I like studying, I like doing things. I've got a management degree I've done a Master's in human resource management as well. These things are because I enjoy actually being able to manage the business, I enjoy being able to manage my people well. And if these things are all happening well, then actually that takes the pressure off me because then I can focus on being the professional, and I think that's something that doctors discover more and more because they are essentially businesses as well. That's why they employ their practice managers who have the management degrees and the HR qualifications to do that for them - um, I don't have that luxury, and therefore you know I did it myself.

There's a huge burden of responsibility on getting everything right. You want to make sure that people get the right thing in a timely manner, but time is secondary to correct. You regret every mistake, and I don't think there's a pharmacist out there who could say they've not made an error. Sadly that is part of being human. I did make an error when I wasn't long qualified that did shake my confidence quite considerably, because it did end up in the patient being in hospital and it was a most unpleasant experience. To the point where you did look at yourself and think you know as this, am I up to this? The patient was tremendous about it and the GP was fabulous about it and the GP said to me at that point something that I've heard a couple of times and which always helps which is 'You've stopped a few of my mistakes going out in your time. So don't worry about this, move on. Learn from it' and that is absolutely what you have to do. None of us get up in the

morning with an idea of making a mistake for someone and it's not a nice feeling, it's so not a nice feeling. But you do have to accept that you are human at times.

I have a far better work life balance here than I've had anywhere else I've worked, because well, I live next door so that does kind of reduce the working hours considerably because I'm no longer spending an hour, to an hour and a half sitting on a motorway. That in itself means that within half an hour of finishing work I can have had my dinner and be out, in the outdoors walking a couple a kilometre long beach or you know having a cycle up to the loch or, you know, everything is there on your doorstep and that accessibility and the time that you don't spend, sitting around in a car doing nothing - enough value can't be put on that, it's tremendous.

We have great success at the smoking cessation service which operates in Scotland. We give them a bit of counselling and we send them away with patches, gum, lozenges - whatever it is they need to try and get them to stop, and the carbon monoxide testing is tremendous because someone's carbon monoxide level up at thirty five - forty, and next week they come in and they're down at two, they're at a level of a non smoker and you're talking to them about about the benefits they're getting straight away, one week after stopping. And you can see that lifts their spirits, and Sometimes if they've had a bad week, they just need to sit and talk for a quarter of an hour about what went wrong and why at that wedding when they'd had three wines, they just needed a cigarette. You know. It's all these little things, that just - you can have a laugh with them about it.

It is really good being able to tick that box, and say, yeah twelve weeks this person has not smoked and see them three months later and you say "are you all right, are you still not smoking?" 'no I'm fine' . And they may still be buying a product themselves but they're not smoking and that is key.

Yesterday I had a lady in for weight management, which is a private service that we run that just helps some people focus on healthy eating and losing a bit if weight. We had a to patient last year who lost, oh gosh, he lost about five stone and at the end of it, he actually came off his and anti-diabetic medication and had reduced his blood pressure medication substantially. It was really a good success. I got a great deal of personal satisfaction out of that as well, it was great to see, yeah.

I was just brought up that everybody deserves to have a say and be involved and be treated fairly, and I think that's all it's about. And that's the NHS isn't it - it's just everybody being treated fairly and the NHS gives you an opportunity to do that as a day job. I quite like that! What more do you want, really?