

staff in the SPOT light

This month:
Ruth Kenton, pharmacy technician, and Sally Hughes, pharmacy manager and dispenser, Rowlands Pharmacy, Wallasey

The *TM* team took a trip to Wallasey, Liverpool to meet **Ruth Kenton** and **Sally Hughes**, the inaugural winners of the Recognition of Excellence Awards Health Equality category. **Millie Browning** reports



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Tucked away in a small town just outside Liverpool, Rowlands Pharmacy in Wallasey has quietly become the hub of the community. This much was made clear via the Recognition of Excellence (RoE) Awards Health Equality nomination two members of the team, Ruth Kenton and Sally Hughes received.

New for 2022, the Health Equality Award was designed to recognise an individual that has identified and tackled inequalities for their patients and communities. Speaking at the time, Liz Fidler, RoE judge and

senior professional advisor pharmacy technician practice at NHS England, said Ruth and Sally had: “An excellent application that demonstrates all the criteria in a sensitive way, providing a valued contribution to all in the community.”

As well as a brand new category, naming two nominees as joint-winners was a first for the Awards. Unfortunately, train strikes and other commitments meant the two couldn’t make it to the ceremony in June, so the *TM* team felt it was only right to take a trip up north from our London-based office to find out

more about the pharmacy that made RoE history.

A well-oiled machine

The small but neatly organised and well-kept pharmacy hosts a team that feels like family and runs the store like clockwork. “We’re a great team,” says Ruth. “It’s all about teamwork. We all brush the floor. We all make tea. We all clean the toilet!”

“Everyone’s got their role and we try and make sure that everybody knows how to do everything,” explains Sally. “Obviously there are bits that only the pharmacist does or I as the manager can do, but our everyday routine works because we all know what we’re doing.”

“Sally is really strong,” adds Ruth. “This shop wouldn’t run like this if it wasn’t for Sal because she is committed 110 per cent. Her memory is phenomenal, she remembers every patients’ name and helps me out. She’s amazing.”

The pharmacy “has excelled in the last 12 months by becoming more service focused,” says pharmacist Lauren Ritchie, who nominated Ruth and Sally for the award. “Our NMS service is often top of the region. We also complete a lot of DMS and are very patient focused so

say yes to any service trials we are offered.”

“There’s quite a lot of different strands to our day,” adds Sally. “Currently we’re promoting Hey Pharmacist, which is a new app for your phone. You can order medication through the app and the order goes to the doctors and then comes to us, and then we text to say that the medication is ready.”

“We’re also heading into flu jab season so that’s a really important part of our day. We have a waiting list so we’re just trying to take names down. We’ve also just started doing some training on smoking cessation and that’s going to start to become more of a focus over the next couple of months.”

“At the moment, it’s hard to pinpoint people [who want to quit smoking]. Usually, they come in and start looking at the lozenges and then I’ll go over and say, do you need any help?” explains Ruth. “There was a man in yesterday and he said ‘I’m hooked on these lozenges now’ and I said ‘you need lollipops!’ I told him about my partner, who 10 years ago when he quit smoking went onto lollipops and eventually, he thought, actually I don’t even want this lollipop now and that was the end of it.”

“It’s not about just selling the product and making more money. It’s about helping people, isn’t it? Because you don’t want them to come back with chest infections and everything in the winter. So, it does pay off eventually!”

A safe space

Since we last spoke, the Syrian refugees Ruth and Sally strove to make feel welcomed into the community have been rehomed across the North West. “They’ve moved to Warrington, St Helen’s and Wigan,” says Sally. “They’ve all got a home now, which is amazing!”

A new group of men, this time from Ethiopia and Eritrea, have since moved in and the pharmacy has just started providing their medication. “I think they also see us as a bit of a safe space,” says Sally. “We just try to make them feel welcome. We’ve got systems in place now and they do seem quite settled around here and it’s a nice area. It’s quite a nice place for them to be in, they obviously feel safe and it’s such a community.”

It’s not just the newly arrived refugees, but the whole community that Sally and Ruth go out of their way to help. But it wasn’t until the pandemic, when they took on over 1,000 new patients, that they really started to understand what the pharmacy meant to the people who come in every day.

“You do look back, and you think, oh my word how did we actually manage that really?” says Sally. “But we



The Rowlands store in Wallasey is both welcoming and well organised.

did. You do because that's the job. You just get on with it."

"I think the patients trust us more now," explains Ruth. "When the doctors closed their doors and we left ours open, they realised that we had a service that they didn't know about. That they could come in for a chat if they wanted,

they could have their blood pressure taken, the flu jab and weight management. It definitely made a difference. The patients do become your friends because they come in all the time."

"We try and chat to people at the counter as much as we can," adds Sally. "We go to funerals, and we send out cards for big

birthdays. We just try and go a little bit above and beyond. I think we've just got a community spirit."

"It's interacting with people," says Ruth. "My daughter works at the hospital and she's always trying to convince me to come and work there. I say yeah but you don't see anybody! It's not all about the money, is it? When we get up, we come to work and we like it. That's key, I think."

"We muddle through," agrees Sally. "The days are busy, but the days are great. We all love our job. We take pride in it, and I think that's important. We want to do well; we want to be successful."

Recognition where it's due

The fundamental aim of the RoE Awards is to draw attention to the amazing work pharmacy staff do every day, something both Ruth and Sally agree is vital.

"I think pharmacies are important to the community," says Sally. "We're so busy here because people can't get to supermarkets. Instead, they come here, it's their first port of call. I think that's why we've done so well because we're popular, which is great."

"You need to be able to come in," adds Ruth. "They can always speak to somebody and, over Covid in particular, the pharmacists were amazing because where the doctors shut their doors, we were still open, and the pharmacist was there – it was hard work!"

"Because of this, lots of pharmacists are so focused they haven't got the time for the people in the shop to chit-chat every day to say, 'how are you?' and build those relationships. It's us

that actually hold the shop up!"

"I think just as an industry pharmacists and pharmacies and the staff need more recognition," says Sally. "I mean the nurses and doctors deserve all the praise they get but I think sometimes pharmacies are left out in the cold a little bit."

Fortunately, it came as no surprise that the RoE Awards are not the only ones to have noticed the incredible work put in by the Wallasey team. This year, they have also been named one of the top three Rowlands branches in the UK, with the final awards to announce the overall winner set to take place in September. We at *TM* can't think of anyone more deserving and wish the entire team the very best of luck!

You can read more about Ruth and Sally's incredible story in our RoE supplement, or visit: tmmagazine.co.uk/ruth-kenton-and-sally-hughes.

VACCINATION TRAINING AND PGDS



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