

# staff in the SPOT light

This month: **NATASHA JONES**  
services manager at  
GMP Pharmacies,  
a Numark member

Since she started in pharmacy five years ago as a counter assistant, **Natasha Jones's** career has gone from strength to strength. **Millie Browning** finds out more



Natasha always wanted to work in medicine, but only made the leap in 2017.

"I always knew I wanted to work in medicine," explains Natasha Jones, services manager at GMP Pharmacies, a Numark member. "I just didn't know what aspect and what area of medicine. I was working in a restaurant beforehand and when I saw the job opportunity for this, I just took it and haven't looked back since!"

This was back in 2017, when Natasha worked for a branch in Colchester who saw her potential. "I went in as a trainee counter assistant, but they just fast tracked me, and I did the combination course – counter assistant and dispenser," she says.

"I became branch manager at Colchester and my site was the first to go

live for Covid vaccinations. I needed to learn all the software first and then implemented that in all of the other branches. So, it was just natural that I progressed into that role and managed it. It took a little bit of strain off the managers as obviously they were so busy in the pharmacies with the workload and demands we have had."

### Prioritising services

As with most pharmacy staff members, a typical day for Natasha is packed full. "I mainly focus on the Covid vaccinations that our sites run," she explains. "We've got four sites now which are vaccinations centres. This involves booking nurses,

**"We took vaccinations to Latitude; I don't think any other pharmacy team can say that they've done that!"**

opening the calendars, and making sure staff are up to date with their training because it tends to change constantly!"

Keeping on top of everything also means that when new vaccines come in, it's Natasha's priority to ensure everyone is informed and feels confident providing them.

She also plays a crucial role in looking at what services other branches in her area can offer and helping to implement those in the pharmacies in her remit. "We look at what is in demand in the area," she says. "What the GPs are commissioning and what they aren't. We speak to different area bodies and find out what they want us to push."

Natasha also pays great attention to the needs of patients, which vary from pharmacy to pharmacy. "Ear services, such as micro suctioning, is quite a big service and we're currently looking into blood testing too," she says.

Natasha encourages her branches to push various health campaigns over social media and in the pharmacy. "For October, we're really pushing Breast Cancer Awareness Month on our social media," she says. All the branches she oversees are Healthy Living

Pharmacies, with a couple achieving Level 2 status, so Natasha prioritises pushing campaigns in branch too.

### Thinking outside the box

Not content with only providing their vaccination services for their local communities, Natasha and her team decided to take their vaccination show on the road. For the last couple of years, they've visited many different events, trying to make getting vaccinations as accessible as possible.

"We have our vaccination buses that we do a lot of pop-up events for," explains Natasha. "We even took vaccinations to Latitude; I don't think any other pharmacy team can say that they've done that!"

The team made headlines last year with their unusual stand at the Suffolk-based festival, seeing it as a chance to appeal to young people who may not visit a pharmacy very often. "We weren't actually inside with the music, we were on the outside where the campers and all the food stands are," Natasha recalls. "So we didn't get to go in and enjoy ourselves! But people were walking past, and it was nice to see them – it was quite a nice break for us all. I think it was great publicity of our own pharmacies as well. We

were on CNN and lots of American newspapers – the directors loved it!"

### The heart of it all

For Natasha, patient care is at the centre of everything GMP pharmacies do. "Patients want to see a familiar face," she explains. "They're not coming into the pharmacy because they want to – they're coming in because they need to, so they want someone friendly. We need to make it a bit more enjoyable. It's so nice for them to know someone so they don't have to explain their circumstances to someone new each time."

Natasha also believes that a positive and enjoyable work environment is crucial in being able to deliver services for customers.

"We all encourage each other," she says. "It's more like a family, I'd say. Everyone gets on well. There are different career paths that we can all go down, and we support each other through that."

It's for this reason that Natasha is still loving her work in pharmacy – just as much as when she joined nearly six years ago.

"I really like connecting with other people and going around to each of the branches," she says. "It's different and it's nice to see how different teams work and how they manage their workload."

GMP Pharmacies also includes one of the biggest independent pharmacies in the UK, and Natasha enjoys being part of growing and developing the business. "I love being part of that journey," she says.