

EDUCATED DRUG DEALER

A peek into the life of a pharmacy assistant

Ellen Kruize Kok

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All persons in my stories are fictional.

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Who is this book meant for?

Patient:

Have you ever been a patient? Have you ever visited a pharmacy and are you curious to know what goes on behind the scenes of this elusive world? You will be surprised by these stories from behind the counter.

Educated drug dealer in training:

Have you always wanted to know how you can legally deal drugs *and* make money off of it?

Student:

Are you planning on working in (public) pharmacy and are you curious to hear about the experiences of people in this line of work? Consider the stories within this book as a useful tool. This book contains a wealth of knowledge for any possible career choice within the pharmaceutical industry. Plus, it has room for notes in the back!

Pharmacy colleague:

Do you want to read wonderful, recognizable stories about how your colleagues experience this profession? Enjoy the stories and anecdotes from your colleagues at the pharmacy.

I want to thank my family, friends,
colleagues, acquaintances and
strangers.

This book is a success because of you.

Preface

An idiosyncratic world

This book was not just written for pharmacy assistants, but for anyone who is interested in the daily goings-on at a pharmacy. It was written by a pharmacy assistant from the Netherlands. I will be giving you a peek behind the curtain – or should I say, counter – of the pharmaceutical industry and my life in general. A world that you don't just fall into if you aren't already a part of it. It is an idiosyncratic and elusive world to outsiders. In the past, I regarded the pharmacy as something 'magical'. Many of my colleagues longingly look back on the 'good old days'. Has that much really changed?

Yes, a lot has changed. I feel privileged to be writing this book. An honest book with raw truths. The beautiful, and less beautiful sides of this profession.

Telling and reading stories is an important part of my life. Over the past couple of years, writing has only increased in importance for me. Writing a book is like a dream come true. But it wasn't easy. I underestimated the task at hand. It was quite an undertaking to write a book while I also had a young family and a job to take care of.

No one asked me to write down the part I played in this magical world, I did it of my own volition – happily, I might add!

What patient really knows what goes on behind the counter of a pharmacy? It is time to tell you that story, in the eyes of the pharmacy itself.

Now, my book lies in front of you. It took a lot of blood, sweat, and tears. But it was worth it, I'm sure of it.



Ellen Kruize Kok – Pharmacy assistant

Introduction

Pill peddlers or box pushers

Yes, you could write a book about the pharmacy. Ten books, even. A pharmacy can sometimes be likened to a pandemonium, making the job of pharmacy assistant one of the most dynamic professions out there. Before, we were called pill peddlers; nowadays, we are box pushers. I'm here to tell you we are much more than that. Whether you work in the pharmacy as a deliverer, pharmacy assistant, or pharmacist, we are always ready to help the patient as best as we can. Through good and bad times.

We work in the healthcare industry to help patients understand the correct usage of their medication. We do this by giving out information, and by continuing to talk to patients, loved ones, and other healthcare providers. We become pharmacy assistants because giving care is in our blood. With this book I want to proudly present a small peek into this incredible profession. I've been around for a while. But there are colleagues who are even more experienced than I am. This book contains many stories, from those who have just started out to those who have been in this profession for years.

Our profession has changed a lot over the last twenty years. Where we used to 'peddle pills' (prepare) all day, we now 'push boxes' (give pharmaceutical patient care). Communication has become the cornerstone of our job as pharmacy assistants. This has led to more discussions about the proper use of medication.

We work with drugs that can be dangerous in wrong dosages!

It is not without reason that the English saying goes:

'BE NICE TO THE PHARMACIST, BECAUSE THEY CAN KILL YOU WITH ONE MISTAKE'

We are present from the moment vitamin K and D drops are given to infants, until the moment morphine relieves the pain at the end of a lifespan. Contrary to a nurse, doctor, or caregiver, we don't stand at the side of your (death)bed. What we do is make sure the right equipment like bandages and drugs are available to you, in the right dosages.

We provide care in a different way. We never stop learning. Not a day goes by that nothing changes in the pharmaceutical care industry: something is out of stock, a certain substance has an undesirable effect in combination with another drug, and all kinds of important information that applies to our patients. It is a challenge to keep up, but we do so out of a passion for our profession.

We see patients after other healthcare professionals have done their job, or we see patients that bring their 'healthcare requests' directly to our counter. At a time like that, we have to check and see if the desired product is a good match with the patient's data we have available to us. We assess whether the patient can be helped by us or whether they need to go (back) to a doctor. We give advice on self-care or lifestyle. With everything we provide, the handling of medication falls into our hands. That sounds simple, but it is a huge responsibility with many different facets. For example, we monitor drug delivery. Patients see us as medication-experts which can result in us being asked a lot of questions.

The logistical side of our job has only grown in size, which means we also receive the brunt of the complaints about that side of the process. We can feel 'attacked' when we provide

explanations and information. It can negatively affect our relationship with the patient. Aggression seems to be on the rise in our profession. We can do something about that together; it has to end!

In the pharmacy, we have to deal with the rules and regulations that are handed to us by the government and health insurance companies. We have no influence over that aspect of our job. We are just the unlucky sods that have to make people aware of them. For some reason, we have acquired a whole slew of tasks that weren't part of our profession before, tasks that have now become completely integrated into our job. To our great dismay.

For one person, we are their guardian angel; for another, we are that stupid bitch from the pharmacy. Yes, *bitch*, because unfortunately – and to my great disappointment – there are but a few men in this profession. I love to see men behind the counter. A team with a nice mixture of male and female colleagues is even better.

In this book, you will read about my education, my first hours in a pharmacy, and my job as a pharmacy assistant. Moreover, a couple of guest bloggers have been given a spot in this book. Through a survey with profession-related questions, small anecdotes have popped up from colleagues which has made it possible for me to shine a light on different aspects of the pharmaceutical industry as a whole. The book is divided up into different parts, based on work experience.

I'm curious to know what insights this book can provide for you. Will you let me know through an email?

info@ellensocial.nl

This book is a real 'must read' for students who have just started their training and a real eyeopener for patients and healthcare providers. Many of the stories and anecdotes will sound familiar to those who work in a pharmacy.

I hope this book can contribute to a more positive image of the pharmacy assistant and the public's understanding of the difficult tasks that are given to us. Here's to hoping that it will be available in every waiting room and break room from now on!

‘A poisoner from the very start.’

Ellen Kruize Kok

Chapter 1

Do you have it in you?

I must have been just about seventeen years old, in secondary school, when I saw the poster calling to me in the hallway. It was a big, green poster portraying a woman in some sort of doctor's coat. It had something written on it, something like: 'Pharmacy assistant. Do you have it in you?' On the bottom of the poster there was a website to sign up for a look behind the scenes of the pharmaceutical industry.

Working in a pharmacy... That hadn't occurred to me before now! Until then, my plan had always been to sign up with the army. Mainly because I enjoyed the adrenaline, and, not entirely unimportant, because I just *had* to pick a profession.

The poster drew me in. A real company, how would that even work? It was a great opportunity to explore an actual pharmacy. With my class I had already visited multiple vocational education schools where stuffy teachers were basically preaching to the choir about their own profession. I had quickly grown bored. In an actual company I would get to see what it was actually like to work.

I signed up through the website. When would I hear anything? Would they even find me suitable enough to spend a day shadowing in a pharmacy?

More and more I started thinking about the next steps in my life. At the end of secondary school you make some important choices. I was terrified of choosing a profession. Like I was meant to tie myself down for my entire life. What would it be like to actually start working? I was struggling with all these choices before I saw...