

CLINICAL SUCCESS

Plan young, aim high

Kishor Ragha's successful journey as a pharmacist started at a young age. From the days of playing around with chemistry sets to leaving his native country to obtain pharmacy qualifications, Ragha has remained committed and confident. Winner of the Pharmacy Business Clinical Excellence Award 2008, Ragha shares his success trail with Faras Ghani...

**Pharmacy Business
Clinical Excellence
Award 2008**

sponsored by

WOCKHARDT

In the life of many pharmacists across the country, these are the days of regret. Long working hours, low pay, pressure to provide increasing number of services, and stagnant



Fact file

Name: Kishor Ragha
Pharmacy: Vantage Pharmacy, Hayes
Number of staff: 5
Services: Diabetes, chlamydia, smoking cessation
NHS to shop-front ratio: 85:15
Prescriptions: 8,000 per month

OTC sales. As a result, many pharmacists are reported to be fed up of the profession, planning a career switch and are rethinking.

With Kishor Ragha, who left his native Zambian order to pursue a pharmacy career, life is smooth at his Vantage Pharmacy. Growing business, lust for knowledge, striving for improvement, complementing accolades, and a prevailing sense of satisfaction. Developing an interest in pharmacy from a very young age, Ragha's commitment to what he wanted to achieve has been a driving force behind his success and his achievements.

'Pharmacy is something I've been deeply interested in from a young age,' he said. 'Even as a child I had my own experimental sets at home that I would spend time with. Therefore, it is a gradual progression.'

Although my family wanted me to become a doctor, more so due to the status symbol than anything else, my interest in chemistry and pharmacy was stronger than becoming a doc. And for precisely that reason, I left Zambia to come study in the UK as the University of

Zambia did not cater for a pharmacy degree. That is how strong my commitment was towards pharmacy.'

Although Ragha did go back to Zambia after his qualifications to start a pharmaceutical industry, conditions proved adverse for the plans and prompted a swift return to the UK. An interest in industrial pharmacy was what gave birth to those plans initially, but as he realised his zest lies in the business side of things, it was not long before he realised what he was cut out for.

'It was the clinical side of pharmacy that interested me in the beginning but obviously as you get older and once you have your qualifications, the focus changes slightly. It still remains towards pharmacy but you then narrow down your options.'

In my case, I narrowed it down to community pharmacy. Following the abandonment of my industry plans in Zambia, I realised I wanted to work in community pharmacy the most and that is the reason I came back.'

It was due to Ragha's desire to be his own

boss that he decided to go into community pharmacy. Signing up with a franchise scheme that AAH had in the early 90s, Ragha developed this interest further and opted to buy out the business as the franchise contract came to an end.

'Looking after a business is what I'm interested in besides the pharmacist's perspective. I'd always wanted to be my own boss. I did get offered fantastic salary at the places I worked at in the past but the fact that they were able to offer me that made me think that I'm capable to making much more by just having my own business.'

'I did locum work in central London and worked as a manager for two years following my return from Zambia. While I was still working as a locum, the AAH offer came up and I became one of the few lucky ones to get onboard. And when, at the end, I had the option to buy out the business, I didn't think twice. It was an excellent decision I made and I've never looked back since.'

Apart from being the pharmacy owner and

the pharmacist at Vantage, Raghya is also a qualified Independent Prescriber and sits on various local committees as well as the LPC. A respect individual among customers and local surgeries, Raghya is contacted by nurses, GPs and patients alike for advice and guidance.

'I do help outpatients in my batch but it does not stop there. The GPs and the nurses would phone me up for advice if they are not 100 per cent sure on something and need a second opinion. We have that rapport with local GPs that we are quite proud of and we respect each other for that.'

Raghya won the Pharmacy Business Clinical Excellence Award 2008 for his specialisation in the treatment of diabetes. He undertakes the full range of tests for diabetes and also advises patients on how to improve their lifestyle. But how did the interest in diabetes develop?

'Around five years ago, we had a diabetes improvement scheme in Hillingdon where we undertook basic tests and advised patients over a period of six months. It was so successful that we, as a group, won a care award for that. Working with diabetes then was what got me interested.'

A Warwick diabetes course came along after that which I enrolled in and passed. So, the more I learnt about diabetes the more fascinated I became and the more I wanted to know. As a result, I wanted to do more than that just prescribing and wanted to look after the patients myself. So I went to King's College and did my course in supplementary prescribing. Following that, I went further and became an IP the following year so now all the decisions will be mine.

'I was happy, prepared and confident to make changes to the medication and it was this confidence that drove me.'

Despite having his hands full and complaining that 'there are not enough hours in the day' to do what he wants to, Raghya has

built up a successful business and he attributes a lot of success to the skills of his staff and the training they underwent.

'You can't keep an eye on everything that is happening in the pharmacy. I have dispensing duties as well. Therefore, it is essential that you give staff the ownership of particular sections and product range. Delegation is the key to success but for that to work effectively, adequate training must be provided beforehand and constant review must be undertaken to ensure a common goal is being aimed at.'

'We have regular discussions with staff and at times, even I'm not aware of products they order since I have given them full authority following the training. I followed a similar path en route success and I'm all for giving them ownership and letting them little entrepreneurs.'

Apart from providing diabetes services, Vantage Pharmacy also provides chlamydia screening and smoking cessation services as well as offering the morning-after pill together with the required consultation.

Raghya's workload is ever increasing. 'I'm busy all the time, the script numbers have shot through the roof and on average we do 8,000 scripts per month. I can't possibly do all this on my own and that's where backup and well-trained staff come handy.'

'Without backup, you can't do all these services and it's dispensing or the paperwork or services. They all take up a lot of time and the only way you can do this is if you have very good staff.'

'I'm quite happy doing the services since I know other parts of the business are in capable hands. I enjoy dispensing, especially when I'm giving out the medication and as the verbal interaction takes place.'

Despite the workload, Raghya's interest in diabetes and diabetic patients is on the rise and he is coming up with ideas and advice to help



The man of the moment before his pride and joy

patients all the time.

'The main aim is to change the patient's attitude towards diabetes. I change the mindset of that person from day one by giving him/her the ownership of the problem. Put restrictions on and list things they should not be doing. Give them all the facts as opposed to just the medication and I find that this works better.'

Although Raghya has his hands full with dispensing, training and offering services, he still has time to ponder over the future of pharmacy. He envisages it to change no doubt but warns of repercussions with the government's desire to see more and more services being undertaken by pharmacists that increase the workload. 'We just don't have the time. For example, I'm giving advice on MURs verbally and not claiming for it as I do not do the paperwork due to not having much time.'

'With Category M and all that, it has become a political issue that will take time to settle down. It will be tough and you can't rely on income from dispensing alone. The sooner the colleagues of mine realise that the better.'

Doing so much can sometimes affect the quality offered, something that Raghya was quite wary of. However, the Award provided the confidence that he needed to strive towards improvement in patient care.

'I never realised my work was of a reasonably high standard until another pharmacist tasked me to apply for the award. It was a fantastic evening and, as every other award-winner, I never expected to win it.'

'However, it was really funny because everyone told me, after I had won, that they expected that to happen sooner than later. It is nice to be appreciated and is satisfying when your work gets recognised but I never undertook all the additional work for the sake of an award.'

'I just love helping patients.'

Kishor's tips for growth

Always know your customer. It also helps if you know them by their first name without having to look at the prescription. Calling the customer by their first name will help with customer loyalty.

Pharmacies that rely on OTC sales need to assess sales regularly. Go shelf by shelf and see how much each metre is producing. Calculate the figures with staff who is in-charge of that area and if a particular product is not moving, you really need to change things around. It is very, very competitive out there and you really have to go out and get your clients.

We are losing market share to the supermarkets and superstores and you need to ensure you provide exactly what the customers need. Habits change and stale products need to get off the shelves straight away. Don't offer small discounts like ten per cent or twenty per cent. Get rid of it at 20p or something attractive so it flies off and makes room for new products.

We have a £1 gondola end which is very popular in the area and the turnover has been fantastic.



Retail components are essential to getting ahead, Kishor says