



Pharmacist and Public Perspectives on Smoking Cessation Services in South African Community Pharmacies

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Jodiane is the runner-up of the YPG Professional Innovation Project 2025

My name is Jodiane Benade, and I am a Master's in Clinical Pharmacy candidate and academic intern at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town. Over the past year and a half, I have been working in a district hospital where I have witnessed, time and again, the devastating impact that smoking has on patients and their families. Every day, I see lives shortened, the quality of life diminished, and hospital beds filled with individuals suffering from conditions that could have been prevented.



One of my most admirable lecturers always reminded us that "clinical pharmacy is a public health matter", and I could not agree more. It is in the day-to-day encounters with patients-struggling to breathe because of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, patients battling recurrent strokes linked to smoking, families losing loved ones too soon - that this statement has taken root in me. These are not just clinical cases; they are people whose lives and futures are profoundly altered by a habit that is both preventable and treatable.

Standing at the intersection of pharmacy, healthcare, and public health, I feel a strong responsibility to do more than dispense medicines. I want to address the upstream causes of illness, and smoking cessation is one of the most powerful ways to change the health trajectory of individuals and communities. This project is my first step toward that vision.

Working in a district hospital has opened my eyes to the reality of how deeply smoking-related illnesses affect people in South Africa. It is one thing to read statistics in a report, but it is entirely different to stand at a patient's bedside and witness the toll firsthand. Many of them are not elderly, as one might expect, but in the prime of their lives: parents, breadwinners,

and young adults with decades ahead of them. What strikes me most is not only the patients' suffering but also the ripple effect on their families and communities. Smoking does not just rob individuals of their health; it drains households of income, destabilises communities, and places a heavy strain on our healthcare system.

What is even more painful is knowing that many of these outcomes are preventable. Yet, despite the apparent need, structured support for people who want to quit smoking remains scarce. Patients often leave the hospital with medicines to manage their conditions, but very few resources to address the root cause of their illness. For me, this gap represents not just a professional challenge but a personal call to action.

Pharmacists hold a unique place in the healthcare system. Unlike many other professionals, we are often the first point of contact for people in their communities. Patients see us not only for medicines, but also for advice, reassurance, and guidance. That accessibility creates countless opportunities to intervene early, to start conversations that could change lives, and to bridge the gap between intention and action when it comes to quitting smoking.

I believe pharmacists are particularly well-suited to deliver smoking cessation support because we combine clinical knowledge with daily interactions. We understand both the pharmacological aids that can help patients quit and the human behaviours that make quitting so difficult. In countries around the world, pharmacist-led smoking cessation services have proven successful, and I believe South Africa can and should move in that direction.

On a personal level, this project represents much more than a research study. It is the beginning of the kind of work I see myself dedicating my career to, connecting clinical pharmacy with preventive care and public health. I am motivated not only by what I have seen in hospital wards, but also by the vision of a healthier country where pharmacists are empowered to do more than dispense medicines.

For me, this is about answering the question: what can I do, with the skills I have, to make the most significant difference? This project is my first step in responding to that call; to serve, to innovate, and to show how pharmacy can be a force for change in South Africa.

This project is designed to be a starting point, a stepping stone toward something bigger. At its heart, it is about listening, listening to pharmacists about what they need to provide smoking cessation services, and listening to members of the public about what kind of support they would use. Too often, health interventions are designed without a complete understanding of the people they are meant to serve. I hope that by capturing these perspectives, we can begin to shape a service model that is both practical for pharmacists and meaningful for patients.

Part of this project will also involve creating simple, co-designed educational materials to help patients understand their options for quitting. Something as small as a clear, supportive leaflet can plant a seed of change in someone's mind. Alongside this, identifying training needs for pharmacists and pharmacy staff will help build a stronger foundation for smoking cessation services in both public and private settings.

The impact of smoking cessation goes far beyond the individual. A patient who quits not only adds years to their life but also reduces financial strain on their household, sets an example for their children, and eases the burden on our healthcare system. In this way, each successful quit attempt becomes part of a larger ripple effect, improving the health and well-being of families, communities, and ultimately, our nation.

This project is more than an academic requirement; it is deeply personal. Every time I walk through the hospital wards, I am reminded of why I chose this profession: to help people live healthier, fuller lives. Seeing preventable suffering has left a mark on me, and I feel a responsibility to act. This project is my way of turning that ache in my heart into action, and of showing that pharmacists can and should play a bigger role in addressing public health challenges.

On a professional level, this work aligns with the kind of pharmacist I aspire to become: one who is not only clinically competent but also innovative, compassionate, and forward-thinking. I see this project as the foundation for a career devoted to bridging the gap between pharmacy and public health, between treatment and prevention, and between patients' needs and the services available to them.

I know that one project cannot solve all the challenges surrounding tobacco use in South Africa. But I also believe that every change starts with a small step. If this work sparks conversations, shapes pharmacist training, or gives even one patient the tools to quit smoking, it will already have been worthwhile.

Ultimately, this project represents hope. Hope for patients, for families, and for future generations. It is my way of contributing to a healthier South Africa, one where pharmacists stand on the frontlines of prevention and every person has the chance to live free from the burden of tobacco.

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