The Community Pharmacy Patient Safety Collaborative project involves staff currently working in a number of community pharmacies in the Greater Manchester area. The participants come from a range of different types of pharmacy – from small independents to large chains and supermarkets. This group mainly consists of community pharmacists but dispensers and technicians have also been valuable contributors to the work.

The main purpose of the project is to engage the community pharmacy staff in a two-way mutually beneficial relationship.

The PSTRC Medication Safety team shares their knowledge on best practice in patient safety and risk management techniques with the Collaborative and the Collaborative shares their experiences and insights of practical day-to-day pharmacy practice with the PSTRC.

As a result of this, the PSTRC is able to make their safety research developments relevant to the needs of the people who can most benefit from it and members of the Collaborative are able to apply their new skills in safety and risk management techniques in their own pharmacies.

It is often suggested that if patient safety is to improve, it should seek to learn from the high hazard industries such as the aviation or nuclear sector. Being that these industries have achieved their reputation for being safe through risk management techniques that are tailored carefully by safety specialists to meet their specific needs, it makes sense that healthcare should aim to do the same. However, healthcare is still a long way from achieving this.

Therefore, the involvement of community pharmacies supports the PSTRC to identify which risk management techniques would work best within the community pharmacy context and how best they can be adapted for them.

Trying and testing these in a real-life context has enabled researchers from the PSTRC to focus their efforts on what can deliver the greatest benefit to community pharmacy – and also enabled the Collaborative to develop and share their solutions – within the Collaborative and beyond.
Members of the Collaborative attend monthly sessions with the PSTRC Medication Safety theme. The sessions include teaching of safety concepts and risk management techniques, as well as sharing of experiences and discussions on the issues currently impacting on the safety of their work. Outside of these sessions, the Collaborative engages in research-based activities – such as audits or applying the taught risk management techniques to their own practice – with a view to sharing their insights within the group.

Members from the Collaborative have shared their experiences through a number of blog posts whilst the Patient Safety Collaborative has been running which are available at the following links:

- The NIHR Greater Manchester PSTRC Community Pharmacy Patient Safety Collaborative: part one
- Community Pharmacy Patient Safety Collaborative: Safety Initiatives
- Patient Safety in Community Pharmacy: the importance of teamwork

The Collaborative is an ongoing project and has recently recruited new members. This provides the PSTRC with insights from Pharmacy professionals with a range of expertise in risk management – those who are more experienced through our long-time working relationships and those who bring fresh eyes and perspectives on the usefulness and usability of the techniques. Their input is essential in focussing the PSTRC’s Medication Safety theme strategy as well as supporting us to deliver this – by suggesting new research areas to be explored that matter to them and working with us to implement this, supporting initiatives such as the development of CPPE’s Risk Management Guide.

Working with a group who are willing to invest time and effort into exploring what risk management can bring to their practice enables the PSTRC to push the boundaries of development of risk management techniques applied in pharmacy practice and potentially move this closer to exploring whether the safety culture of high hazard industries can be achieved in healthcare.