

Aseptic Insight: Unpacking the Sterile Truths of Pharmacy



Work Environments



Helen Clark¹, Alexandra Clark^{1,2}, Conor Joyce¹

1. Aseptic Services, Wirral University Teaching Hospital (WUTH). 2. John Moores University

Wirral University Teaching Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

1. Introduction

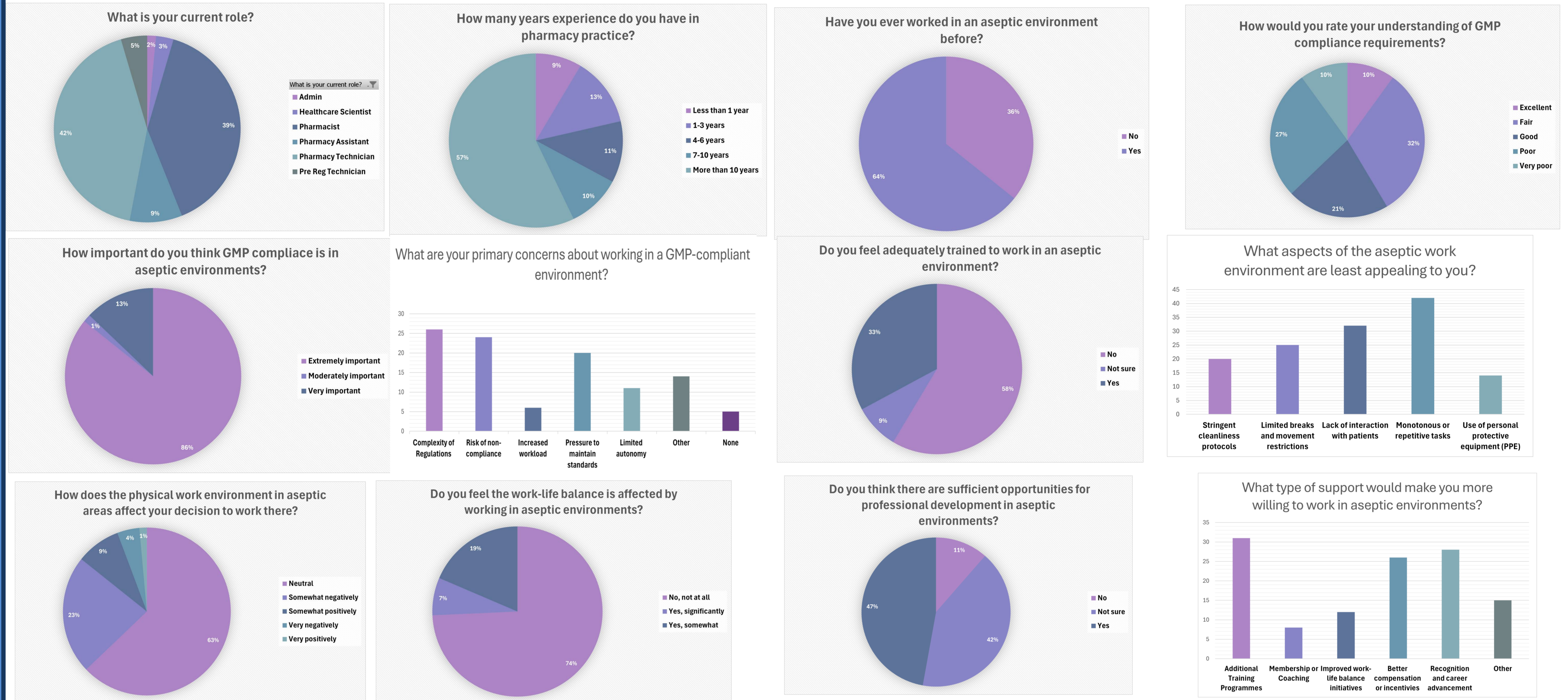
Aseptic environments are crucial in pharmacy practice, ensuring the sterility and safety of compounded medications. However, working in such controlled settings can be challenging, leading to reluctance among staff. This study seeks to identify the key factors contributing to this reluctance and to explore potential solutions to make aseptic environments more appealing. The research aims to answer the question:

"What are the main factors driving reluctance among pharmacy staff to work in aseptic environments, and how can these be mitigated?"

2. Methods

A mixed-method approach was used, combining quantitative data from a structured questionnaire with qualitative insights from open-ended responses. The survey was distributed to WUTH pharmacy staff. The questionnaire covered various aspects of working in aseptic environments, such as training, workload, regulatory compliance, and personal preferences. In total, 70 responses were collected, analysed, and categorised to identify common themes and concerns. The narrative feedback provided deeper insights into the personal experiences and perceptions of the respondents.

3. Questionnaire Results



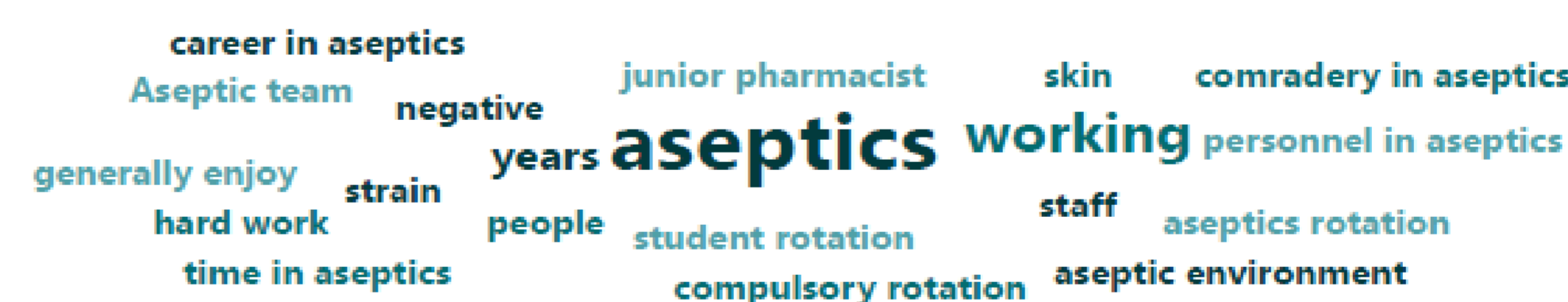
What improvements would you suggest to make aseptic environments more attractive to pharmacy staff?

15 respondents (35%) answered aseptic for this question.



Any additional comments or concerns regarding working in aseptic environments

10 respondents (38%) answered aseptic for this question.



The survey revealed several key factors contributing to the reluctance of staff to work in aseptic environments:

- **Regulatory Complexity:** Many respondents cited the complexity of GMP regulations as a significant source of stress and pressure. The fear of non-compliance and its potential consequences deterred some staff from seeking roles in aseptic environments.
- **Workload and Breaks:** A common concern was the demanding nature of aseptic work, particularly the lack of breaks and the expectation to work beyond contracted hours. This was especially challenging for staff with personal responsibilities, such as those with young families.
- **Limited Professional Interaction:** The isolating nature of aseptic work, with limited interaction with patients and other colleagues, was frequently mentioned. This lack of social engagement contributed to feelings of monotony and disconnection from the broader pharmacy practice.
- **Physical and Environmental Factors:** Issues such as skin irritation from PPE, the drying effects of airflow systems, and the discomfort of prolonged standing in isolators were also highlighted.

Despite these challenges, some respondents noted that initial reluctance often diminished after gaining more experience in aseptic settings. This suggests that better onboarding and training processes could help alleviate some of the initial fears and misconceptions.

6. Conclusions and Future Work

The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to make aseptic environments more attractive to pharmacy staff. These include:

- **Enhanced Training and Support:** Providing more comprehensive training on GMP compliance and aseptic procedures, along with clear career progression pathways, could reduce anxiety and build confidence among staff.
- **Work-Life Balance Improvements:** Addressing concerns about workload, by offering more flexible working hours and regular breaks, could alleviate some of the physical and mental strains associated with aseptic work.
- **Increased Professional Interaction:** Creating opportunities for greater interaction within the aseptic team and across the pharmacy department could help mitigate feelings of isolation and monotony. Many respondents expressed a desire for better communication and understanding of aseptic roles within the broader pharmacy practice.

By addressing these factors, it may be possible to reduce reluctance and encourage more pharmacy staff to consider roles in aseptic environments, thereby ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of these critical areas in pharmacy practice.

The single-centre nature of this study, conducted at WUTH, presents limitations in terms of generalisability and applicability to other healthcare settings. The specific practices, work culture, and population demographics at WUTH may not reflect the experiences or conditions at other institutions, limiting the external validity of the findings. Additionally, the study may be influenced by institution-specific factors such as leadership styles, resource availability, and operational pressures, which may not be present elsewhere. The authors acknowledge that while this study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing reluctance to work in aseptic environments, the findings are context-specific and may not be widely generalisable without further research involving multiple centres.

Contact Author Helen Clark Aseptic Services Manager helen.clark54@nhs.net