



**Help from above:**

**A Flying Doctors aircraft has landed on a landing strip in the Australian outback to pick up a patient.**

**Photo: dpa**

AUSTRALIA

## Pharmacy in a land Down Under

By Sven Siebenand / Dr. Hana Morrissey from Darwin, Australia will have one of the longest journeys to the International Pharmaceutical Federation's congress in Düsseldorf. She works as a pharmacist in various areas of pharmacy and thus has a good overview of the pharmacy system in Australia.

**PZ:** Why did you study pharmacy?

**Morrissey:** I wanted to work in the health sector and to help people. At the same time, however, I am also fascinated by innovations and discovery. Pharmacy appeared to me to be better suited to combining my interests than medicine. What is more, my favourite uncle was a pharmacist and another uncle was a doctor.

**PZ:** How do you become a pharmacist in Australia?

**Morrissey:** You can study pharmacy at 19 universities in this country. It takes four years to graduate with a bachelor's degree, then you do a year in practice under the supervision of a registered pharmacist. So a total of five years to become a pharmacist. In addition, you can also take a Master's in pharmacy. Around 80 percent of Australian pharmacists work in a public pharmacy, 15 percent work in hospitals. Some colleagues are accredited by the Australian Association of Consultant Pharmacy and

make house visits to patients for medication analyses. They don't simply look at the medication, but also study test results, suggest medication and work together with the patient's doctors.

**PZ:** How can you get medication out to the customers in a country as big as Australia with many remote areas? People still live in the outback, the areas remote from civilisation that make up almost three-quarters of Australia's land mass.

**Morrissey:** There are around 5300 pharmacies ensuring a supply of medication. Public pharmacies have around 300 million patient contacts a year. This makes them the most frequently visited provider of health services. You do need to distinguish between town and country. 80 percent of the pharmacies are in urban areas. Around 425 towns in Australia have just one pharmacy. In most areas of Australia it can take up to two hours to drive to the nearest pharmacy; it can even take several hours in the more remote regions. There are many what we call "remote stations" that keep a stock of drugs to hand for emergencies.

**PZ:** If someone in the outback falls ill, how does he get to these drugs?

**Morrissey:** The emergency chest is sealed and contains around 120 important medications. Each of these is packed in a bag that is also sealed and numbered. If someone in a remote area falls ill, he contacts the Flying Doctor Service which then decides whether the emergency chest should be opened and which drug should be taken from the chest and how it should be used. Depending on the severity of the illness, this might be all the treatment required, or this may only be initial therapy until help arrives by aircraft. It is also possible that the patient will have to be evacuated. The individual drug packages are marked with the drug's expiry date. If this has been passed, it is swapped for a new one by a pharmacy.

**PZ:** Are there chains of pharmacies in Australia?

**Morrissey:** No. There are no chains as such, but there are franchise models. A pharmacy must always be at least 55 percent owned by a pharmacist. The public pharmacies have a very good reputation in society. However, the perception of them by the government and other health professionals could be improved.

**PZ:** What do you mean by that exactly?

**Morrissey:** Pharmacies and drugs are not supported so intensively by the government as are doctors and medical services. Cooperation with most of the health professions is good, but the doctors are always thinking about protecting their boundaries against the other healthcare professionals to protect their leading position and income.

**PZ:** You do not work in a public pharmacy, but in other areas. What does your working week look like?

**Morrissey:** One half-day a week I work in the Royal Darwin Hospital's pharmacy. Three days a week are spent in research and teaching at the Charles Darwin University. I supervise the PharmD students who are running projects in the field of clinical pharmacy. Last but not least, I work one half-day a week in the military pharmacy, as I am also a reserve officer in the Australian army. I have 20 years of experience in the Army and have seen active service in a number of conflict zones. This activity is also the reason why I will be coming to the next FIP congress.

**PZ:** How did that come about?

**Morrissey:** I have been an active member of FIP's Military and Emergency section for more than 20 years. One of the sessions at the congress that is being organised by this section deals with the

problem that emergency pharmacists in disaster situations are frequently confronted with the task of relieving the patient's stress, but forget to manage their own stress. The session at which I have been invited to speak is concerned with how we can detect and reduce our own stress factors. For some years I have been looking at first aid measures for our emotional state. First I want to publish the results of a study that looked at the question of what effect first aid training of this kind can have.

**PZ:** What do you expect from the congress?

**Morrissey:** It is my fifth FIP congress. The event always offers a good opportunity to get to meet pharmacists from all around the world. We can learn a lot from each other. /



“The government could give pharmacists more support.”

Dr. Hana Morrissey, Australian pharmacist