



## **Celebrating Women In STEM with Rebecca Wicks, Clinical Pharmacist and Independent Prescriber**

Rebecca is a Clinical Pharmacist and Independent Prescriber with two children in the Senior School of Morrison's Academy. Her Specialist Interest is in Women's Health and she regularly educates her colleagues in Community and General Practice Pharmacy on the recent developments in Menopause Education. Rebecca extends this education to the staff at Morrison's Academy to enlighten them of the potential impact of Menopause in the Workplace. Her family Pharmacy Business started in 2000 at the University of Stirling and now extends to 41 branches across most Health Boards in Scotland.

### **What are your memories of STEM at school?**

I was at a comprehensive school in South Wales in the 80s and we didn't know the term STEM then! I remember being excited to have lessons in the Science labs because there was always something interesting to look at other than just sitting at desks and chairs and looking at the blackboard.

**Science:** The Biology lab had stuffed animals in glass boxes and anatomy skeletons on a stand; the air in the Chemistry lab always had a whiff of something that had been burning, huge posters of the periodic table & irresistible bunsen burners that led to mischief amongst the adventure seekers who sat at the back and loved to see if they could set their tie alight! My Physics teacher looked like Supermario and was very passionate about his subject.

**Technology & Engineering:** In S1 & S2 we had lessons in Craft Design & Technology (CDT) which was like woodwork. As we neared the end of school a whole classroom was redesigned to become the Computer lab with 30 or so computers for us to learn to use. Screens were black with green writing and if you needed to save anything you used a floppy disk. It was a hugely exciting development for the school at the time.

**Maths:** I did Maths to A-level and remember loving the satisfaction of getting the right answer to the harder level work. It was tough though and I had to drop the statistics part in the end to focus and get a good grade on the rest of the syllabus.

### **At what age did you know that you wanted to go down a STEM career path?**

From around the age of 12 I wanted to be a dentist, so I chose my GCSE's to include all three sciences. However, when I went on work experience to my friend's Dad's practice I really didn't enjoy it. I had only ever had a scale and polish at the dentist and didn't get a filling until I was 23 so I had quite a skewed view of what being a dentist actually entailed! When I witnessed a tooth extraction I knew it wasn't a career for me.

### **Who was your inspiration in STEM?**

No-one in particular. However my grandmother was a doctor in Beith, Ayrshire for 30 years and my great-grandmother was a doctor in Aberdeenshire before that which was probably an unusual profession for a woman at that time. She has a street named after her in Old Meldrum.

**Tell us a bit about your journey to your current role**

After deciding dentistry was not for me, I accompanied my best friend to some Pharmacy Open Days. Once I'd looked into it more I realised it was a good mix of science and working with people. There were also lots of career options after degree level so I felt I had access to a variety of opportunities ahead. I completed my Pharmacy degree at University of Bath then returned to my home town of Newport, in South Wales to complete my pre-registration training year in Royal Gwent Hospital. Once I had qualified I did regular weekend shifts as a community Pharmacy locum so I didn't lose the different skills for this sector. I was also on the executive of the British Pharmaceutical Students Association (BPSA) so I was juggling this with working as a newly qualified which looking back was quite ambitious! The BPSA committee expanded my network of like-minded and enthusiastic peers and I developed friendships for life. Some of us are still in touch today and I even went as far as to marry one of the committee members!

I have had lots of hospital jobs over the years after studying for my Clinical Diploma. My experience has covered Renal medicine, Aseptic Dispensing, Paediatrics, Medicines Information and Ageing and Health. My roles in Community Pharmacy have included Pharmacy Manager, Pre-registration Tutor, Education & Training roles and Care Home coordinator. My current focus is on Women's Health & Menopause and my time working in a large Menopause Clinic last year was a career highlight. Pharmacy has evolved a lot since I qualified in 2000 and I have just recently completed my Independent Prescribing qualification which allows me to prescribe medication in areas I am competent and I look forward to using this to help patients access healthcare more timeously.

**Did you find it challenging at any point as a female in the industry you have chosen?**

No - it has been a female dominated profession for a long time. At the moment about 70% of the profession are female. However working in healthcare can be challenging and demanding, but offset by rewarding and fulfilling work.

**What strengths do you think females bring to STEM?**

Empathy, nurture, emotional intelligence and in-depth communication

**What advice would you give to any young girl who wants to go into a career in STEM?**

- 1) Understand your strengths and weaknesses
- 2) Research different careers that are a fit for you and align with your strengths, passion and values
- 3) Ask for help and support to get where you're going
- 4) Remain curious and interested in new developments relevant to your career
- 5) Look after yourself - work life balance is important