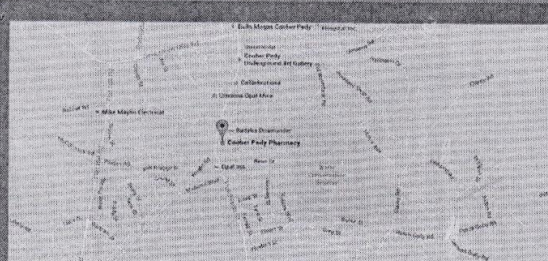


Health destination for the entire township

Coober Pedy Pharmacy shines like the opals mined in the town, with its sole focus on meeting the varied needs of its community.

Fast facts



Name: managing pharmacist Abu Taiab Md Jamaluddin (Jamal), Coober Pedy Pharmacy, South Australia.

How long have you been a pharmacist?

I graduated in 2002 in Bangladesh. I gained my Australian registration in 2014.

How many staff do you employ?

We have one dispensing technician, one pharmacist and two pharmacy assistants.

How long have you operated your current store?

As pharmacy manager, for nearly two years.

Do you offer professional services?

Yes, we have a range of them.

What kind of customers do you attract?

In summer, mostly residents, and in winter we get a lot of tourists.

What is the philosophy for your business?

Giving the customer the best possible service and advice.

If you wanted to nominate a one-pharmacy town that defines Australia's outback, then Coober Pedy would have to be at the top of the list.

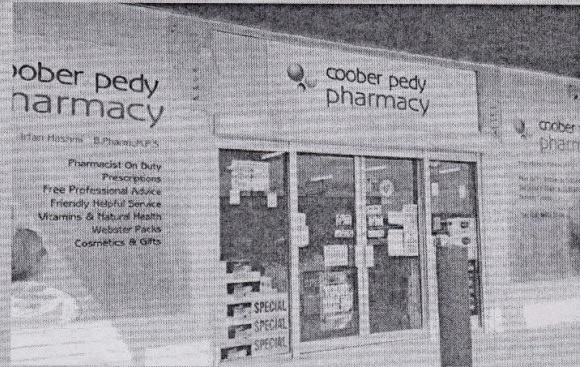
About 850km north-west of Adelaide, it lies on a dry and dusty plain in the 'middle of nowhere' but thrives on the opal industry, which is so lucrative the town lays claim to being the opal mining capital of the world. The opals sustain the town's population of some 3,500 people, about 80 per cent of whom live underground in dwellings known as 'dugouts'. While the population is small, the diversity is great, with some 45 nationalities registered as residents.

Throw in a climate so severe

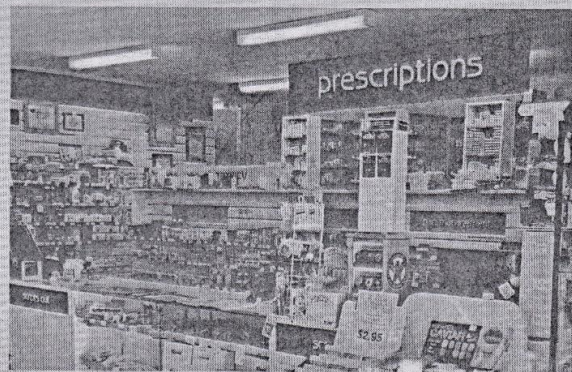
that temperatures can rise to more than 40° in the shade in summer and you have one of the most challenging environments for any pharmacy. Named Coober Pedy Pharmacy and run by Bangladesh-born Abu Taiab Md Jamaluddin, or 'Jamal' as he is more commonly known as.

Mr Jamaluddin has been at Coober Pedy Pharmacy since 2011, but only as managing pharmacist since late 2014. The intervening years are testament to the pharmacy's commitment to its small staff and also to Mr Jamaluddin's determination to practise his profession in a new land.

"I was a pharmacist in Bangladesh and came to Australia, but my qualifications



Front of shop is where Mr Jamaluddin spends most of his time.



Coober Pedy Pharmacy services people of around 45 nationalities.

were not recognised, so I had to go through the system to become registered as a pharmacist here," he said.

"I came to Coober Pedy initially because it was almost impossible to find work in the cities. I started as a pharmacy assistant, then as an intern, and after completing all my requirements during two years I got my registration and I've been managing the pharmacy since. The pharmacy and its owner, Irfan Hashmi, supported my development and made it possible for me to become registered in Australia."

It was Mr Jamaluddin's determination to use his pharmacy training in Australia that led him to seize the Coober Pedy opportunity when he saw that such opportunities in major metropolitan areas were almost non-existent.

"I knew it would be hard work,

but I was determined to practise as a pharmacist, so my family and I moved here," he said. "It hasn't been easy, but the work at the pharmacy is very rewarding."

With a staff of four including Mr Jamaluddin, the pharmacy has its work cut out for it. Interestingly, Mr Jamaluddin says one of the greatest challenges facing the staff is language and understanding what he describes as Coober Pedy slang.

"Many of the residents came here after World War II from Europe and most can't speak English very well, so communication is an issue, but we go out of our way to ensure that we take the time to learn what our customers need and meet those needs," he said.

"One advantage of having a small population is that I know most of the customers, and when they walk in I know what their medicine needs are. This is my

fifth year here and I am part of the community and I know it. This is a real advantage for me and the pharmacy and also, of course, for the residents of the town.

"However, the whole dynamics of the pharmacy can change in winter because we get a lot more visitors coming through as the climate is better. We get visitors from all over the world coming to see the dugouts and the opal mining and, of course, they expect to be able to get their medicines here just as they would in a city.

"We are close to six hours' drive from the nearest townships, but the drug companies are good at supplying and, as long as we order before noon, we will have the product the next day. However, people from the cities may not be used to this and expect to be able to get unusual prescriptions filled immediately, but as a regional pharmacy we build this into our everyday operations.

"We are not in a position to approach other pharmacies to lend us medicines if we get a prescription for something which is out of stock. You can do that in the cities and some larger regional areas, but we really are on our own out here. You have to adapt to that and work around it."

Mr Jamaluddin has refocused the pharmacy's operations on professional services and has a separate counselling area for patients. The pharmacy provides smoking cessation and weight loss counselling. Also on offer are free blood pressure checks and blood glucose monitoring, among other things. Sleep apnoea services are also on the menu.

"There is a need for this sort of service in this area," Mr Jamaluddin said. "I have also done my flu vaccination training

and I would like to introduce vaccination services into the pharmacy."

The past two flu seasons were exceptionally tough, with the result being that cold and flu products have been the pharmacy's main OTC category. Not surprisingly, as the only pharmacy in town, the team finds itself helping patients harbouring a wide range of minor ailments.

"We have one doctor in town and also a visiting doctor, and we have some specialists come once a month and others only every three months, so there are not many health services," Mr Jamaluddin said.

"People know the pharmacy is where they can get treatment and advice and the result, of course, is that many people come into the pharmacy to seek treatment for minor ailments because of the convenience and because we are very accessible. They know they can come in here and we will look after them.

"I like to spend as much time as I can at the front of shop talking to patients and to counsel and provide advice. I enjoy interacting with patients and ensuring we are meeting their health needs. There are so many nationalities here and every person has their own story, which is really fascinating.

"As far as the pharmacy goes, I would like to extend the counselling area with private rooms. Our customers really appreciate the advice and counselling services, which is why I try to spend as much time as possible front of shop.

"Unlike people in cities, people here have the time to spend with you and the result is that you can have very worthwhile counselling sessions which can make a real difference to/in the customer's health."



Staff at Coober Pedy Pharmacy go out of their way to understand customers' needs.

The pharmacy is a major provider of Webster-paks and works closely with Aboriginal Health Services, the local aged care facility and Coober Pedy Hospital to meet the needs of patients.

"We are currently preparing up to 400 Webster-paks a month, and this is a major part of our business," Mr Jamaluddin said. "We have contracts with Aboriginal Health Services and the aged care facility, but that amount of Webster-paks is quite high when you consider how small the population of Coober Pedy is."

The pharmacy's two assistants are locals and the dispensary technician originally hailed from Melbourne, but Mr Jamaluddin says getting trained staff is very difficult.

"The reality is that not many people want to come here," Mr Jamaluddin said. "When you arrive it's scary – there's not much of the town to see because so many people live underground.

"When you live here, you soon realise that most non-working activities are focused on the town because to do anything outside of it entails such a long drive. You become a part of the community and on weekends you socialise with people from Coober Pedy.



Pharmacist Abu Taiab Md Jamaluddin has expanded professional services for sleep apnoea and vaccinations.

The residents here are very welcoming but, even so, it can be hard at first and I was lucky as I had my family with me. Now we are part of the community and the pharmacy is a part of it as well.

"We join in community activities and sponsor things such as the 35km Great Breakaways Marathon, which is held before the Opal Festival each year. The Coober Pedy Pharmacy is a health centre for the entire township and we are very aware of what a responsibility and honour that is."

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