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A CENSUS FOR THE FUTURE

Next week, all pharmacists will receive a census form from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. These forms will be sent to pharmacists' registered addresses and it is imperative that all recipients complete a form and return it as soon as possible.

There are a number of reasons why the Society's census exercise needs to be a success and they are covered in an article in this week's issue (p302).

At first glance, some of these reasons seem not to be of particular relevance to individual pharmacists and are more to do with proving that the Society is capable of keeping tabs on its members, knowing who they are and what they do.

However, that is only a small part of the story. In an article, also published in this week's issue (p291), Karen Hassell and colleagues from the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of Manchester suggest that there are considerable gaps in what is known about the pharmacy workforce. It is common knowledge that there are problems with recruitment and retention in many parts of Britain, but what the scale of the problem is, what has caused it, and how it might be solved is speculation.

The workforce census, if all pharmacists fill in their details accurately, will do much to answer these questions. In addition, the results of the census and regular follow-ups will be able to ensure that future workforce needs are better planned and that new pharmacy initiatives can be met by the profession.

For example, it is known that just over half of pharmacists on the register are women. However, among those between the ages of 21 and 39, the proportion of women rises to 64 per cent. Women also dominate the hospital sector and, according to Hassell *et al*, there is some evidence that more women are working full-time compared with 10 years ago.

But what will these young women be doing in 10 years' time? Will there be enough of them to do the jobs, particularly in the community, that have traditionally been carried out by men working long hours, as well as to fill the new roles that are continually being created?

Understanding what the profession does and how it is comprised will help to ensure that available jobs reflect the needs and interests of pharmacists. More importantly, it will also reassure the Government that there is a pharmacy workforce trained and in place to provide a planned and co-ordinated national pharmacy service.

So, fill in the census form as soon as it arrives!