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## OPPORTUNITIES LOOK LIKE THREATS

Pharmacy, like other health care professions, is a secure one but many pharmacists, particularly those working in the community, at the moment feel it is anything but. Last weekend's storm and the cover illustration are good metaphors for the state of the profession.

Since the launch of the Pharmacy Plan in England in September 2000 and the equivalent documents for Scotland in 2001 and Wales last month, hopes have been raised. The future looked rosy: pharmacists, it seemed, would become an essential part of the National Health Service team and have greater clinical responsibility and there would be far less drudgery in their working lives.

Unfortunately, since these hopes were raised initially, the Government has started to dismantle the infrastructure that has served the profession well for the past 20 years or more and has not yet put anything solid in its place. It started with the loss of resale price maintenance and has continued with the investigation by the Office of Fair Trading into control of entry, the investigation into the pricing mechanism for generics, the renegotiation of the national contract and the development of local pharmaceutical services contracts. And all that just for starters.

In a news feature this week (p638), we look at the threats and opportunities facing the profession. Pharmacists, like most people, fear change. Until now, changes to pharmacy practice have been incremental, but now the Government is expecting them to overhaul their working practices but with no clear indication of what tangible benefits the process will bring.

The Government needs to start making some decisions so that, even if they are not quite what members of the profession dream about, they will at least know where they stand and can begin to rebuild the infrastructure. Unfortunately, until the Government gives some pointers to the direction in which it is travelling, the profession will feel overwhelmed by the uncertainty. And all the opportunities will look more like threats.

## LAWYERS WILL BE THE WINNERS

In an attempt to clarify whether the Charter of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society would take precedence over the powers of Government in the context of the modernisation programme, *The Journal* invited its legal adviser to pass an opinion. The results of his deliberations can be seen on p653. Readers will be reassured by his comments, whatever opinion they already hold. The suspicion is, however, that the only winners will be the lawyers.