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## PATIENT PACKS NEED ATTENTION TOO

The announcement by the Department of Health this week that it wants to see paracetamol, aspirin and iron preparations being sold in child-resistant blister packs from the middle of next year (see p767) is a reasonable one. The accidental ingestion by a young child of any medicine is distressing to all involved. Fortunately, such incidents are declining and fatalities from paracetamol, aspirin or iron ingestion are rare. But there are larger issues of patient safety that need to be looked at too.

For far too long pharmacists in Britain have been forced to take their scissors to carefully prepared packs of medicines, cutting and snipping to produce odds and ends of blisters. These are then loosely bundled together and given to unsuspecting patients (with or without a patient information leaflet). These mangled and miscellaneous packs, potentially containing mixed batches of a medicine, are an unwanted and unwelcome hazard to patients. If pharmacists do not seem to treat medicines or their packaging with respect, then why should patients?

The whole issue of patient packs, their design and contents, and the dispensing of them (intact) must be urgently re-examined by Health Ministers. Much of the future work for pharmacists, such as repeat dispensing, medication reviews and the use of electronic transfer of prescriptions, would be made a great deal easier if patient pack prescribing became the norm. It is time that pharmacists were allowed to put away their scissors and get on with ensuring that all patients get the best and safest use of their medicines.

## LOOKING GOOD BUT SAYING LITTLE

During the past two weeks, *The Journal* received several invitations to go and listen to the words of wisdom of Health Ministers and take pictures as they launched their latest initiatives. These have included pharmacist prescribing and the new medication reviews guide (*Pfj*, 23 November, p731 and p737).

Pharmacists are keen to take on all the new roles that Ministers have for so long been saying that they are ideally placed to do, and it is time that the Department of Health turned its attention to fleshing out the details of these. The profession needs an answer to the key question of how they are all going to be funded, rather than being offered photo-opportunities which look good but say little.