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## HALF FULL OR HALF EMPTY?

In 50 years' time, will 2002 be thought to have been the beginning of the end of pharmacy, or the end of the beginning? Pharmacists are no different from other men and women: for some, their cup is half empty; for others, it is half full.

For those pharmacists who are by nature pessimists, it is the end of pharmacy as they know it. For a start, and most recently, how can the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee be trusted to strike a good deal with the Government over the new contract if it cannot protect today's income? And England's chief pharmacist seems to be threatening to take away any significant role for pharmacists in the dispensing process and expects pharmacists to hand over, willingly, to technicians. Moreover, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society seems to be opening its doors to all-comers: more lay members on the Council, plus registration of technicians. And if that is not enough to deal with, the threat of the Office of Fair Trading investigation into control of entry is still looming and the whole business of generics is still unresolved. How can pharmacy possibly survive?

Optimistic pharmacists, who see their cup as half full, have a different take on events. They long to see the back of the current contract. The problem with the old contract is that it does not recognise the clinics they have established for post-myocardial infarction patients at their local surgery. It does not recognise the support they give diabetes patients and those who take warfarin. It does not recognise the bone density screening scheme they have established or the repeat dispensing scheme that is successfully up and running. These pharmacists long to be free of the dispensary. Oh, brave new world!

Of course, these two groups are caricatures: most pharmacists are pessimistic about some aspects of their professional lives and optimistic about others. Nevertheless, hospital pharmacists, those who work in industry, academia and alongside general practitioners, and other members of the primary care team cannot quite understand what all the fuss in the community is about. They know there is a wider world outside pharmacy; those who engage in that other world know that pharmacists are often highly respected but that respect is not earned by navel contemplation.

So whether you think it is the beginning of the end, or vice versa, seasons greetings to you all — whatever your outlook!