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SINGING FROM THE SAME SONG SHEET

It is not often that everyone in health care sings from the same song sheet. Doctors, pharmacists, pharmaceutical industry executives, patients and even members of the Green Party (p751) are all united in condemning the practice of snipping foil-wrapped packs, making up prescriptions with more than one version of a product and bundling the whole lot into a plain box without a product information leaflet. It is astonishing that this practice is allowed to continue: it is not what the doctor ordered for the patient, it wastes pharmacists' time, it confuses patients and it may even lead to dispensing and administration errors.

When *The Journal* launched its campaign and invited various individuals and people to comment on the parlous state of original pack dispensing in the United Kingdom, it was revealing that it was impossible to persuade anyone from the Department of Health to contribute. Eventually, within 48 hours of the deadline, a comment was forthcoming — but whether or not it was worth waiting for is debatable (*Pfj*, 17 May, p685).

Pharmacists have learnt — with their response to the Office of Fair Trading recommendations for the relaxation of the control of entry regulations — that their MPs will listen if they write and, if enough of them write, something gets done. Dorothy Kirby, a pharmacist from Buckinghamshire, has told us that she has already written to the Secretary of State for Health, Alan Milburn, and her MP to demand that patient pack dispensing becomes policy as soon as possible.

We intend to gather all the material we have published and any letters we receive on the subject and send them to the Department of Health, as well. If you wish to add your voice, send an e-mail to editor@pharmj.org.uk with “Patient pack dispensing” in the subject line.

STRIKING A CHORD WITH EXPERT PATIENTS

Patients with chronic diseases often know a lot about their condition and the Government's Expert Patients Programme was launched in September 2001 in order to harness some of this knowledge. Last week, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society hosted a seminar to explore the concept of expert patients and how they may hold the key to a healthier Britain (News feature, p743). What is true is that, since most expert patients will be on chronic medication, the pharmacists who dispense their medicines are in an ideal position to help mobilise their skills.