

Join in the fun

With just over four weeks to go before the new GP contract goes live on 1 April throughout the UK, pharmacists, be they in community, primary care or the hospital sectors, should not let the opportunity to be part of the action pass them by. Over the next three years, general practice has been offered approximately a 33 per cent increase in income through the contract — which is driven by the quality of services offered, rather than purely their quantity. Not surprisingly, most of these services can only be provided by GPs — but by no means all. Under the broad terms of the contract, some services may be commissioned by GPs from other health care professionals, while others are in the gift of a primary care organisation.

In other words, the massive hike in cash that is being offered to general practice will not all find its way into the pockets of GPs — not only because of the commissioning arrangements outlined above, but also because GPs will physically not be able to provide all the services themselves.

In previous issues of *The Journal* (most recently 31 January, p122), we have pointed out that, with many GPs opting out of 24-hour cover, there are opportunities for pharmacists to contribute to out-of-hours care. This week, in **Agenda for 2004**, we launch a more detailed series (p247) introducing pharmacists to the structure of the new general medical services contract and, over the weeks leading up to 1 April, we will look at those aspects where the greatest opportunities for pharmacists lie.

This week we also publish a **News feature** (p240) that partly focuses on the views of Dr John Chisholm, chairman of the General Practitioners Committee at the British Medical Association, who was closely involved in the development of the contract. He actively encourages pharmacists to join in the fun — which, if nothing else, is an indication of how far pharmacy has come in recent years. It is hard to imagine, say 10 years ago, GPs welcoming pharmacists into the primary care team with such open arms.

Pharmacist prescribing: Scotland first

We hope all readers will join *The Journal* in sending congratulations to the first group of pharmacists who are now designated supplementary prescribers on the Register of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. The group of 14, who completed their training through Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, this week received notification that they are now registered (p235) and able to sign their own prescriptions. The first prescription to be signed by a pharmacist is likely within a few weeks, once pharmacists have obtained prescription pads in community and primary care, and personalised stamps in hospitals.

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