

# Light at the end of the tunnel

In June 2003, a special general meeting of around 350 pharmacists asked the Council of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society to “arrange for a referendum of the entire membership to be held to establish the level of support for any proposed new Charter once the details of any such proposal(s) have been finalised” (*PJ*, 7 June 2003, p802).

The proposer of the SGM motion referred to the Council’s worry, set out in “Fit for the future: Why do we need a new Charter?”, that the debate on reform was being monopolised by “a small but vocal minority whose views do not reflect the majority view”. He insisted that a referendum was the only way to find the views of the “silent majority”.

Now, one tumultuous year later, the Charter ballot has been held and 9.3 per cent of the membership has voted (p277). Although the “yes” vote won the day, the percentage of the membership voting “yes” amounts to only 7.9 per cent; but, on the other hand, only 1.4 per cent of the membership voted “no”. The silent majority, it appears, has remained silent.

Given that the Privy Council requires the Society to demonstrate the support of members in its application for a new Charter, how it will view such a poor response remains to be seen. But the fact that members, having sought a referendum, have now been given an opportunity to vote may be enough for the Privy Council. Let us hope the “yes” vote is a light at the end of the tunnel.

## Good news for community pharmacists

This week’s announcement that the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee has reached an agreement over the funding of the new community pharmacy contract (p277) is good news for pharmacists. It is another step — and a significant one at that — towards the new contract being implemented.

The new contract will undoubtedly create opportunities for community pharmacists to develop services and to gain recognition for the professional roles they provide. But there are still many issues that need to be tackled. This is demonstrated by the new role of First Contact practitioners (p282). Three pharmacists are among the first 146 professionals in training to become patients’ first point of contact with the NHS; an alternative to GPs. The first hurdle they face is access to patients’ medical records. In March, Health Minister Rosie Winterton promised that proposals to allow community pharmacists access to patients’ records were on the cards (*PJ*, 6 March, p267). Pharmacists are still waiting.

Then there is independent prescribing by pharmacists. Again, a consultation on this has been promised by Government, and that promise was restated by the chief pharmaceutical officer for England, Jim Smith, last month (*PJ*, 17 July, p91). We hope it is published soon.

If pharmacy is to move forward — and with the new contractual framework it has a real opportunity to do so — then the Government has to consider the profession’s development in its entirety. Failing to do so will seriously restrict pharmacy’s future.

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