

# Unintended consequences

It is the unintended consequences that tend to scupper the best-laid plans. The provision of out-of-hours primary health care services is a case in point. It has been suggested that when patients found out that GPs would no longer have to provide an emergency service under the terms of their new contract, they thought there would be no GP-provided out-of-hours service at all. As a result, accident and emergency departments have reported increasing numbers of inappropriate attenders. This problem may have been further compounded by the departure of numbers of A&E doctors in recent months

## Pharmacies that have close relationships with particular general practices that are no longer open on Saturday mornings may choose not to open on Saturdays as well

— attracted to general practice by the improved terms and conditions of pay.

There now seems to be a further potential strain on out-of-hours services, with the announcement of the details of the new community pharmacy contract. Contractors, it seems, will be able to choose which hours in the week they open their pharmacies — provided they stick to the hours they stipulate (p671). This may mean that pharmacies that have close relationships with particular general practices that are no longer open on Saturday mornings may choose not to open on Saturdays as well. So patients wanting some speedy advice or who have a minor ailment that requires treatment may also turn up at A&E.

However, unintended consequences also provide opportunities. Some pharmacists have already started to become involved with the provision of out-of-hours services for primary care trusts. Other pharmacists may realise that there could be benefits from opening their premises on Saturdays: even if dispensing is limited, they may, for example, be able to offer prescription reviews or smoking cessation consultations — at times some patients will find more convenient than during the working week. And if, in a particular area, pharmacists are reluctant to open on Saturdays, primary care trusts may find that they have to make special arrangements with certain pharmacists in order to ensure that there is a limited primary care service.

We would like to think that the Government had anticipated all this upheaval in the out-of-hours service and had planned changes so that what was no longer being offered by one profession could have dovetailed with new services offered by another.

The provision of out-of-hours services is special because they are universal. However, if there is a moral for pharmacists to this tale it is this: find out what the primary care organisation is finding difficulty in providing, and see if there is a way that your pharmacy can offer part, if not the whole, of a solution.

### Editor and editorial director

Olivia Timbs  
Tel 020 7572 2414

### Deputy editor

Andrew Haynes, MRPharmS  
*The Society section*  
Tel 020 7572 2421

### Managing editor

Graeme Smith, MRPharmS  
*Letters and other contributions*  
Tel 020 7572 2426

### Assistant editor

Michael Thompson, MRPharmS  
*Editor — PJ Online*  
Tel 020 7572 2428

### News editor

Harriet Adcock, MRPharmS  
Tel 020 7572 2415

### Senior news and feature writer

Clare Bellingham, MRPharmS  
Tel 020 7572 2416

### News and feature writers

Tom Moberly  
Tel 020 7572 2417  
Hannah Pike, MRPharmS  
*Notice-board*  
Tel 020 7572 2430

### Contributions editors

Dawn Connelly, MRPharmS  
*Reviews*  
Tel 020 7572 2427  
Lin-Nam Wang, MRPharmS  
*Continuing professional development*  
Tel 020 7572 2413

### Production editor

Christopher Icha

### Website controller

Gowan Clews  
Tel 020 7572 2418

### Personal assistant to the editor

Emma Kerby-Evans  
Tel 020 7572 2414

### Administrative assistant

Pauline Heslop  
*Branch meetings, copyright, permissions*  
Tel 020 7572 2422

### Editorial advisory board

Angela Alexander, FRPharmS  
Judy Cantrill, FRPharmS  
Noel Dixon, MRPharmS  
John Hall, FRPharmS  
Christina Lowe, MRPharmS  
Steve Wicks, MRPharmS

### Head of business development

Philippa Stabelin

### Office administrator — sales

Jo Cook

### Classified and systems support — sales

Clare Knights

### Display sales

Stuart Thomas

### Classified advertisement manager

Lily Emery

### Head of publishing services

John Wilson

### Production manager

Joanne Marks

### Production assistants

Yasmin Asghar  
Adam Jones

### Director of publications

Charles Fry