

A wake-up call

Members of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society should have already received the consultation document for proposals to establish a new structure for the Society to deal primarily with professional matters. This consultation is the latest phase of the devolution review that was launched by the Council last year and it asks a number of questions of the membership. An abbreviated version of the document is published in *The Journal* this week (pp667–8).

The key question covers the establishment of three national boards (for England, Wales and Scotland). If supported, these boards would examine professional issues that reflect developments in policy and strategy in the provision of health services in the three home countries, as well as inform the Council's deliberations, particularly when professional issues impact on the regulatory agenda.

The establishment of such boards is seen to be essential in Scotland and Wales and an extension of what already exists. Now that health has been devolved to both national governments, with increasing signs that the services are diverging, the Society would quickly lose its voice and influence in the two countries if it did not have an infrastructure that would enable it to respond quickly to developments.

Perceived to be less necessary, perhaps, is the establishment of a similar board for England. The role envisaged for the board has, after all, always been performed for England by the Council. Why bother to set up something else? And, anyway, the Government has not changed its ways of working, so why should the Society change the way it influences the Government at Westminster?

To a certain extent those arguments are reasonable. However, there is a case for the Society in England to have a body (like the ones envisaged for Scotland and Wales) looking after professional matters. In a sense, this consultation is a wake-up call to pharmacists in England. Let the Society know what you think about the proposals, because it is no longer a question of leaving things as they are. This is the beginning of a new way of working for pharmacists and pharmacy in all three home countries.

Let us hope the guarantee is not restrictive

At last, there seems to be some progress in the development of the NHS IT programme — Connecting for Health. In this week's issue a **News feature** (p673) examines the Government "guarantee" that will be employed to protect any confidential information about patients. Too much protection, however, may be detrimental to some patients' health, so as the programme rolls out and patients and professionals experience how it works in practice, it must be hoped that the guarantee is not so restrictive that pharmacists cannot provide the best care.

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