

Recipe for reclassification

A self-limiting acute condition that can be treated with a single, effective medicine: such is the perfect recipe for reclassification of a medicine from a prescription-only product to a pharmacy product. Now, after many years of waiting and hoping, pharmacists and patients have been rewarded: the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency has given the go-ahead for the treatment of conjunctivitis with over-the-counter chloramphenicol eye drops (p697).

For patients this will be a huge boon. Conjunctivitis can develop rapidly. It makes people self-conscious and, too often, there is a delay in getting an appointment with a GP.

Pharmacists will, within the first few hours of symptoms developing, be able to offer a treatment that has been known to work for decades. A process that can last two days will be reduced to five minutes.

There have been fears about the safety of chloramphenicol (associated with the development of aplastic anaemia and grey baby syndrome) but, if the eye drops are used carefully and as recommended, the risk of systemic absorption of chloramphenicol is low.

Tellingly, the Government's desire to encourage self-treatment and reduce the burden of trivial conditions on the NHS may have counted for something during the recent consultation over the switch. This is not to suggest that safety has been compromised but that good sense has prevailed.

NAWP — 100 years of fellowship

Just over 100 years ago, women were only beginning to make their mark on the pharmacy profession. A handful of women had managed to qualify but, faced with a traditional male governing body and accepting the difficulty of attempting to join them, they launched out on their own and formed the Association of Women Pharmacists. Since renamed the National Association of Women Pharmacists, it celebrates its centenary, which coincides with the anniversary of the inaugural meeting, next week. We mark the occasion with an 18-page special feature beginning on p729.

That it has kept going for 100 years must be seen as an achievement and a reflection of the fact that the association has provided valuable advice and assistance to women throughout the 20th century and beyond.

Now that the profession is more than 50 per cent female, some people may wonder whether NAWP has a purpose any more. But with increasing numbers of pharmacists (men as well as women) developing portfolio careers, changing direction mid-career or spending their lives as locums, the value of membership of the association (now open to men as well as women) in giving practical support is not likely to disappear.

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
Editor — PJ Online
Tel 020 7572 2428

News editor

Harriet Adcock, MRPharmS
Tel 020 7572 2415

News and feature writers

Dawn Connelly, MRPharmS
Tel 020 7572 2427
Tom Moberly
Tel 020 7572 2417
Hannah Pike, MRPharmS
Notice-board
Tel 020 7572 2430

Contributions editors

Gemma Cleveland
Reviews
Tel 020 7572 2416
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

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