

Scotland leads the way again

Once again, Scotland has come up with a first: a solution — albeit partial — to a problem besetting primary care all over Britain. This time it is in response to the decision made by many GPs in April not to provide out-of-hours cover that has left some people unable to see a doctor to obtain essential supplies of medicines unless they visit an accident and emergency department.

In Scotland, a national patient group direction has been established that will enable patients to obtain their medicines — provided they have previously had a repeat prescription for the same medicines from a GP in NHS Scotland — from pharmacists during the evenings and weekends (p682). The supplies can be for the full prescription and not just the five days' supply allowed when a conventional emergency supply is requested. Pharmacists in Scotland are also to be given a one-off payment that will cover the extra workload that they will experience out of hours between Christmas and the end of February.

These moves accord with Government aims in all home countries to make better use of pharmacists, bearing in mind the easy access that members of the public have to them.

And it is a theme that is reflected in the views of the All Party Pharmacy Group, whose chairman Howard Stoate has just written to Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State at the Department of Health, about the forthcoming White Paper on primary care and social care (p678). One of the key points made by the APPG is: "[Pharmacists'] accessibility and trusted status, combined with the positive effect of the new contractual framework within which they are now operating, enables you to use them as a principal means of delivering improvements in primary care."

It will, of course, be much more convenient for patients when pharmacists pick up the services discarded by GPs. However, effort and resources should be concentrated on the development of services that pharmacists can provide which will actually improve patients' health and well being — and not just on developments that reduce GPs' workload.

Retention fees 2006

Christmas is coming and, along with the fatted goose, Society members can expect the arrival of the less-than-welcome annual retention fee demand. This year the forms should be with pharmacists during the week beginning 12 December, giving them roughly six weeks to make the appropriate payment before they are sent striking-off warnings. This week we carry an article explaining the new fee structure in a question-and-answer format (p706) that should answer most members' queries.

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