

Your country needs YOU!

Lord Kitchener famously appeared in a First World War poster calling men to arms with the slogan "Your country needs you!". This week the sentiment is echoed by the President of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society who invites practising pharmacists in all sectors of the profession to consider putting their names forward for the elections to the new national pharmacy boards for England, Scotland and Wales (p429). Elections are due to take place during December and January. The boards — to be established to reflect the different directions pharmacy practice in the three home countries is taking as a result of devolution — will be concerned with professional issues and will inform the Council's decisions when it comes to creating policy.

In a very real sense these boards need to attract leading pharmacists from hospitals and those working in primary care and industry to ensure that cognisance of practice in these areas underpins the boards' decisions. With the best will in the world this does not always happen in the Council. Currently there is one practising pharmacist from academia, from hospital and from industry, but with the majority of the other pharmacists with toes in the community, decisions may sometimes be inadvertently biased towards that sector. The establishment of the national pharmacy boards is a huge opportunity to rectify this imbalance.

Sitting Council members are not eligible to stand for election to the boards in Scotland or Wales. On the English board, the Council member representing England, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands will sit as of right and two further members will be appointed. Perhaps other Council members, even though they may be eligible to stand for election to the English Pharmacy Board, may decide that it would be better for the profession for them not to put their names forward and so ensure that the pharmacists leading the profession come from as wide a range of backgrounds as possible.

A cat among the pigeons

So Pfizer has put a cat among the pigeons! Its claim that by granting exclusive distribution rights to UniChem it will be better able to ensure that counterfeit medicines do not enter the supply chain rings rather hollow. Rather, it seems more a way to maximise Pfizer profits and squeeze the margins for community pharmacies (**Letters** p423). Other wholesalers must be seriously thinking about whether their own survival will depend on doing similar deals with other key pharmaceutical companies. And let us not forget that UniChem is now linked to Boots through the Alliance Boots merger. Many questions need to be asked of Pfizer and its executives will need to work hard to reassure the profession. At the very least, the competition authorities should take a look at the deal.

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