

Abolishing the blame culture

Few people have any doubt that errors are unreported in the health service and a paper in the *BMJ* reveals the scale may be even greater than suspected (p761). The decision by the Government to overhaul the error reporting system developed via the National Patient Safety Agency and to refocus the agency's activities means that patient safety is going to be further up the agenda in 2007 (p761).

Add to this the decision made by the Council of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society earlier this month that the Society will seek to have dispensing errors decriminalised (16 December, p723 and p753) as well as giving Society inspectors the responsibility of sorting out minor problems at a local level (p773) and error reporting rates may start to go up in the future.

Although many health professionals are weary of the comparisons made between their activities and those of people working in the air and oil industries, the stark truth is that until managing mistakes in the health service becomes a transparent process and people learn from each other's lapses without fear of admonishment or retribution there is unlikely to be much improvement in the number of errors that occur.

It is human nature to keep quiet because, if someone makes a mistake and does not admit it, he or she may get away with it; coming clean, however, may involve the individual in all sorts of bother. Just ask any politician, journalist, accountant or lawyer! Why should the world expect health professionals to behave any differently? Their duty of care to patients and their professionalism should make them respond differently, although clearly many of them do not — otherwise many more errors would be reported.

The Journal welcomes any initiative that will lead pharmacists and other health professionals to admit to all mistakes — "honest" as well as "careless" ones. Being open and willing to discuss problems with other health professionals will be a start in ridding the health service of its current blame culture.

As 2006 draws to a close and 2007 is no longer a distant time, we hope that all pharmacists will consider making a resolution to manage any errors they may make in a better way next year.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

It is hard — looking back on 2006 — to typify the year in a few words or phrases. In this week's **News feature** (p764) we have gathered together some of the low points (such as the oxygen debacle) and highlights (the launch of independent prescribing). In a sense, it was a year of consolidation and of waiting for things to happen. Next year should see more progress on a number of fronts. In the meantime, enjoy the holiday period and join us again on Twelfth Night!

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