

Engage the silent majority

Lord Hunt, it seems, has achieved something that no one else has done in living memory: he has united the profession. Former presidents and secretaries of the Society, and various other members (as well as lay members of the Society's Council), are demanding that either the Government stops interfering in the Society's future or — if the future is integral to its policy — declare its hand (p604, p607 and p626).

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Whatever the Government — and that includes ministers and chief pharmaceutical officers — may want for the Society, it will not be determined simply by a desire for “a new body akin to a royal college”, if the membership of the Society decides that is not what it wants.

So what does the membership want? Apparently, a lot of pharmacists are keen on the idea of a royal college-type body. They like the idea of specialist pharmacists finding support within an academy or faculty structure. They like the idea of the Society being turned inside out and then opening its doors to a plethora of groups within the pharmacy family. Then there are those who quite like the college idea but are keener to preserve

the identity of the Society as a representative body for pharmacists alone.

It would be a huge achievement if most of these wants were to be satisfied: a body primarily governed by elected pharmacists (provided there is some sectoral representation) with faculties for all members of the pharmacy family, whose deliberations feed into part of the structure providing support for the General Pharmaceutical Council, and another part offering services, support and advice to individual members (ie, the British Medical Association without the negotiating committees).

Although *The Journal* has a good idea of the range of views of the engaged minority of pharmacists, nobody has yet discovered what the silent majority wants (if anything). The Society must move quickly to engage them as soon as possible if it wants to keep its head above water and not lose momentum.

None of these plans — whether grandiose or modest — will come to anything without money. As the Society's President, Hemant Patel, has already warned (p597), there is likely to be a substantial increase in retention fees next year, not only to fulfil the regulatory obligations, which are increasingly onerous under the terms of the Section 60 order, but also to pay for the massive amount of work that has to be done to ensure some sort of secure future for professional leadership.

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