

Scottish view on Society and devolution

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society is seeking views on how it should adapt to devolution. This week, key stakeholders met in Scotland to discuss the issues. **Clare Bellingham** reports

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society is not meeting the needs of pharmacists in Scotland. This is the essence of the message that seven groups — who together represent the interests of nearly all pharmacists in Scotland — have put forward to the Society's devolution review. But the stakeholder group is far from negative about the Society's future. "We very much want York Place to lead our profession in Scotland," they say. The trouble is that right now they believe that this is not happening.

The Society announced earlier this month that it is seeking members' views on how it should adapt to meet the political and social changes brought about by devolution in Scotland and Wales (*PJ*, 9 October, p541). As part of the consultation process, the Society's review group met key stakeholders in Edinburgh on 26 October.

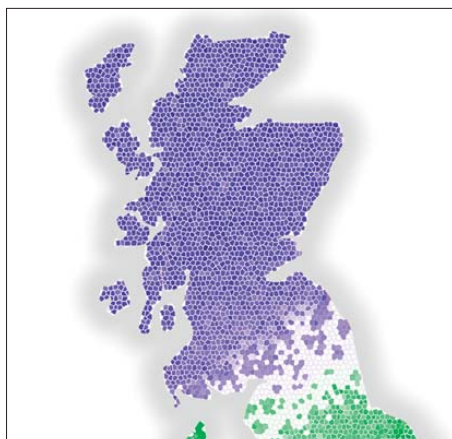
The seven stakeholders who came together to present a united front are: the Association of Scottish Chief Pharmacists (Acute Care), the Association of Scottish Chief Pharmacists (Primary Care), the Scottish Pharmaceutical General Council, the Scottish Pharmaceutical Federation, the Scottish Specialists in Pharmaceutical Public Health, and the two schools of pharmacy in Scotland — at the Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen and at the University of Strathclyde. They submitted their views in writing before the meeting.

The cause of the Society's problems

The root cause of the Society's problems is the fact that responsibility for health policy is devolved whereas health regulation is not. This means that the Society, with its dual roles of professional representation and regulation, has found itself making UK-wide decisions might not always be most appropriate for Scotland and Wales.

Since powers were devolved to the Scottish and Welsh administrations, health policy has started to diverge. And this has resulted in differences in the way that pharmacy is developing in England, Scotland and Wales. The seven stakeholders point out that there are differences between the values and cultures of Scottish and English society. "This inevitably impacts on the population's health and therefore it would always be appropriate for health matters to be devolved," they say. On top of this, each country's population has particular health needs and devolution allows these needs to be met at a local level.

It is only five years since devolution. Yet already many examples exist of different approaches to health policy. Each country has its own pharmacy plan. The Scottish and Welsh governments responded differently to Westminster on the Office of Fair Trading's



Review group met in Scotland this week

report on control of entry. And the Scottish community pharmacy contract is taking a different approach to the contract drawn up for pharmacists in England and Wales.

The stakeholder group points to the different NHS management and clinical structures in Scotland. "It is essential that the Royal Pharmaceutical Society in Scotland is able to interact effectively with these structures. The present arrangements within the Society do not accord to these principles," they comment. "For example, great attempts are being made to involve the public in the redesign of health services in Scotland. This requirement is now enshrined in Scots Law and therefore a statutory duty on health boards. It would not be appropriate for the Society in Lambeth to dictate how Scottish pharmacy services develop to meet the desires of the Scottish public."

Furthermore, they comment: "The Society in Scotland is not currently empowered to interact autonomously with the Scottish Government. This must be rectified soon otherwise the opportunity to participate fully in the development and implementation of Scottish health policy will be missed."

A view of the future

The stakeholder group is adamant that it wants the Society in Scotland to lead the profession as a strong, well-regarded and well-received professional body. It proposes that the Society takes a collegiate structure: an English college, a Scottish college and a Welsh college all reporting to an overarching UK-wide Society council. This model has the benefit of allowing devolved matters to be addressed by the colleges and UK-wide issues to be dealt with by the council.

Since health regulation is a power reserved to Westminster, it is perhaps not surprising that the stakeholders recommend that regulation should be managed centrally at

Lambeth. "Rules and standards for entry to the pharmaceutical register must be appropriate and applied consistently across Great Britain," they say. But within this, they suggest that the Scottish context and practice should be taken into account.

It is in professional representation that the stakeholders want a stronger role for the proposed Scottish college. "An empowered York Place should be the champion of the profession in Scotland and to do this the Society must be active at the front line of Scottish politics, representing the profession and influencing Scottish policy development and implementation," they say.

The group suggest that the Scottish college should have responsibility for standards of practice, postgraduate education and training, advising the government in Scotland, and promoting the profession in Scotland. It would be led by a chief executive and have a council with representatives from community pharmacy, hospital pharmacy and academia, and a technician among its membership.

On policy formulation, the stakeholders want York Place to be given the power to interact with the Scottish government and be able to support the development and implementation of policies in Scotland. Although some policies will take a UK approach, Scotland must be able to make its own policy and be able to choose how it implements UK-wide Society policy, they say.

Turning to pharmacy education, the stakeholders want an education committee to be created at York Place. Undergraduate education should be tackled by Lambeth but postgraduate education and practice development should be dealt with in Scotland.

The consultation also asked where the Society should hear disciplinary cases. The stakeholders say that, because regulation should be retained by Lambeth, York Place should act as a host for hearings with Lambeth managing the process.

Debate and consultation

What it comes down to is this: pharmacists in Scotland want to be able to respond to what is happening in Scotland. They believe that Lambeth cannot carry out this function and they want a Scottish organisation with the power to represent them.

When the Society launched the devolution consultation, it urged members to put forward their views. The model proposed by the Scottish stakeholders should certainly stimulate debate. Members still have three weeks to make contributions. The Society's devolution review group will then make its recommendations to the Council early next year.