

# People who make the rules should engage with those who teach them

By Joy Wingfield, Keith Wilson and Sandra Hall, members of the APPLET management team

November saw closure of yet another Royal Pharmaceutical Society consultation, this time on principles that should underpin pharmacy education and training. Within the consultation document were a series of desirable objectives but no detail as to how these were to be achieved. Individual pharmacists have already recognised that the changing health care environment and new responsibilities call for constructive action from the Society. Their responses to the Society's consultation on the new Code of Ethics, included a plea for the Society to address "educational and training needs that the change in the Code will bring" and the view that "the Society will need to strengthen the education and support available to pharmacy students and members of the Society in preparing them to exercise judgement".

As the team managing the APPLET (Advancing the Provision of Pharmacy Law and Ethics Teaching) project to advance the undergraduate teaching of pharmacy law and ethics we can only agree — and we lament the fact that next year APPLET will fold without some tangible support from the Society for its objectives. The APPLET project team has responded to the consultation on education with proposals (see Panel) relating to student education on:

- Professional behaviours, values and attitudes and fitness to practise
- Principles of health care law and ethics and their application to pharmacy practice
- Sources and systems of UK law relevant to pharmacy

We believe that, since this group of competencies is core to the practice of pharmacy, there is a need for those who make the rules to take a direct involvement in setting educational standards and supporting continued development and delivery of this component of the curriculum.

## Concerned

The progress of APPLET has been reported earlier (PJ, 29 October 2005, p549) and we have involved members of the Society's staff and Council in our activities and progress. We are now concerned that much of this effort may be lost if we fail to lobby for some initiatives to consolidate this progress.

We have made four proposals to the Society in our response to its consultation on education. Our first proposal simply asks for a return to past practice when, until 2003, the Society hosted biennial meetings with those

who taught law and ethics in schools of pharmacy. Given the scale and pace of change in regulatory and ethical challenges created by expanding pharmacy roles, the need for a re-engagement between rule-makers and rule-teachers is heightened, not diminished. There is a need to establish such liaison on a regular and frequent basis to facilitate dialogue, perhaps share case studies, to help lecturers keep abreast of the Society's expectations for competencies in aspects of health care law, regulation and ethics.

Secondly, we seek incorporation of the consensus core curriculum for pharmacy law and ethics (better expressed as professionalism, health care law and ethics) into the Society's planning for syllabus review and the development of a competency-based specification for the MPharm degree. The development of such a curriculum has been of considerable benefit to those new to professional practice teaching or wishing to develop

new topics. Staff teaching "pharmacy law and ethics" are frequently part-time teacher practitioners who need help to enhance their own understanding of, and to teach students about, UK legal systems, principles of health care law and ethics, and professional qualities.

## Society's responsibilities

Thirdly, we believe that the scope of APPLET falls squarely within the area of professionalism and the Society's regulatory and ethical responsibilities. We suggest that there is a case for active participation of the Society as a regulator to ensure continued development of this unique professional area of the curriculum and of methods to support learning. At least partial funding support from the Society would enable APPLET to maintain its momentum as a national educational resource. Simple maintenance of a website requires funding, together with academic input to maintain its quality and currency. Further development could include teaching material for new topics, new teaching and assessment methods, courses and workshops for lecturers and seminars using expert speakers from related fields.

Our final proposal may be a "work towards" policy and we hope that one day it will happen. Our experience is that lecturers in professional areas of practice are aware of gaps in their technical knowledge and expertise in fundamental areas of health care law and ethics that should be understood by all health care professionals. They do not need this expertise necessarily to teach students all the detail but to give themselves "head room" to inform their teaching. As roles of pharmacists take them into ever more challenging clinical practice, this need will grow rather than diminish. In 1998 the General Medical Council endorsed suggestions from an expert group that schools of medicine should recruit specialist lecturers in the field of health care law and ethics to develop and enhance teaching quality. We believe the time is now appropriate for the Society to explore a similar recommendation for the MPharm course.

Competencies in professionalism, and in the wider fields of health care law and ethics, are new pastures for pharmacy. Stimulated by scandals in other health professions, a rising propensity to complain and litigate in our citizens and a long-awaited transition from supplier of medicines to clinical professional, we know that schools of pharmacy can rise to the challenge of preparing new pharmacists for these perils. But to make real progress we need collaboration from the Society.

## Proposals from APPLET

1. The Royal Pharmaceutical Society should re-establish the interface between those whose functions in the Society make and interpret the "rules" governing pharmacy and those who teach these topics within the MPharm.
2. The future competencies to be achieved within the MPharm should reflect the consensus curriculum on pharmacy law and ethics developed by the APPLET project after consultation with lecturers in pharmacy law and ethics, practitioners and stakeholders.
3. The Society should offer financial support for the continuation and expansion of the APPLET resources to review and develop the national curriculum in response to change, to assist lecturers in delivering the future competencies of the MPharm and to develop, pilot and evaluate new methods of curriculum delivery.
4. The Society should develop a strategy to secure the quality of teaching in professionalism, law and ethics in the MPharm course. In particular, this should include (a) review of accreditation criteria to make explicit the requirement for a senior staff pharmacist to have responsibility for the professional part of the curriculum, and (b) interpretation of "appropriately qualified" in the context of pharmacy law and ethics to mean at least one permanent member of staff at senior lecturer or above who is both a pharmacist and has postgraduate qualification in health care law or health care ethics