

BRITISH PHARMACEUTICAL STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Deregulation — is it good or bad for community pharmacy businesses?

The 61st annual British Pharmaceutical Students Association conference was held in Cardiff from 13–17 April

There is a high level of disagreement among British Pharmaceutical Students Association members about whether the Office of Fair Trading recommendation to abolish the control of entry regulations will damage pharmacy businesses.

A motion at this year's annual BPSA conference proposed that deregulation would damage pharmacy businesses. A lively debate ensued. BRUCE REYNOLDS, Portsmouth, said that if the OFT recommendation is implemented it will be the final nail in the coffin for independent community pharmacy.

CHARLOTTE SMITH, Bath, also spoke for the motion. She believes that local community pharmacies will suffer if control of entry is deregulated. She told participants that in the village where she lives there is one local pharmacy but several out of town supermarkets nearby. If restrictions are removed and dispensing contracts granted then access to services for elderly or immobile patients will be compromised, she said. "Pharmacy is about health care, not about profits," she concluded.

NOEL WICKS, ex-Bradford, said: "It is all about planning. If you are the head of a primary care trust and you have pharmacies opening and closing on a weekly basis then how are you supposed to plan for service provision within that area?"

REBECCA BOURN, Bradford, spoke against the motion. She commented that deregulation will help young pharmacists wanting to start their own businesses because deregulation will result in it becoming cheaper to buy a pharmacy.

MIKE EMBREY, ex-Nottingham, pointed out that pharmacists are being encouraged to grasp new challenges and move to new areas of health care and that this will require investment. "If we are not confident that the investments we make will deliver predictable returns in the future then we will not be able to make these investments," he said.

SCOTT DALGLEISH, ex-Strathclyde, spoke against the motion on the grounds that it was not constructive. He believes that a middle ground will be implemented by the Government. "There will probably be a review of the contract provisions whereby it is slightly easier to get a new contract and health boards will still have a strategic influence on how health care provision in the area is managed," he said.



Students voting at the BPSA conference could not agree on whether the OFT's recommendation would damage pharmacy businesses

The motion was neither carried nor discussed with seven votes for, seven votes against and 25 abstentions.

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

The OFT recommendation was also discussed later in the conference during a question and answer session chaired by DIGBY EMSON, superintendent pharmacist for Boots The Chemists. Questions from participants were put to a panel consisting of ALASTAIR BUXTON, head of NHS services, Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee, ANDREA ROBINSON, chairman of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's Welsh Executive, TREFOR WILLIAMS, head of business support at the National Pharmaceutical Association, and KEITH BRAIN, a senior lecturer at the Welsh School of Pharmacy, Cardiff University.

Mr WILLIAMS said that the NPA is sure that the OFT has come to the wrong conclusion about the wrong thing. The recommendation does not favour pharmacists, pharmacy or the public, he said. In Scotland and Wales there has been an outright rejection of the OFT's conclusion. However, in England, Patricia Hewitt said in Parliament that she was sure they could come up with a balanced package of measures. "Now I have never seen one of those and nobody can tell us how big it is, what shape it is and what it is going to balance with," said Mr Williams.

Mrs ROBINSON said that although competition regulations are UK-wide, NHS

matters are devolved. "The Welsh Assembly is not at all impressed by the Department of Trade and Industry telling it how it will or will not plan its pharmacy services in the future," she said.

Mr BUXTON said that the PSNC concurs with the NPA in rejecting the OFT recommendation, however he expects that all four home countries will be in a similar situation. "The home countries did outrightly reject deregulation but in her statement to the British Parliament, Patricia Hewitt did make it clear that acceptance of outright deregulation is not an option in England either."

Competition is a good thing but it needs to be managed, said Mr Buxton. "PCTs should be given more power to decide

where they wish to see pharmacies located taking into account the impact a new pharmacy may have on access to services elsewhere," he said.

OTHER MOTIONS PASSED

- Pharmacy undergraduates should have the opportunity to undertake interprofessional learning with support from neighbouring universities and relevant professional bodies
- The Royal Pharmaceutical Society should hold open days at its headquarters for preregistration trainees and undergraduates
- The Royal Pharmaceutical Society should consult the BPSA with regard to student issues within the profession for an official student opinion
- A member of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's Council should be affiliated to and actively involved with a specific school of pharmacy
- All students who request it in writing should receive free subscription to *The Pharmaceutical Journal*
- It should be a legal requirement that every prescription should have a section to document patients' allergy status
- The BPSA should withdraw from the European Pharmaceutical Students Association at the end of the current membership period

SGM will be a useful contribution but wider debate needed

During a question and answer session JAMES WOOD, Aston, asked members of the panel for their opinions on the special general meeting that has been requested to debate changes to the organisation of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, and in particular proposals to increase the proportion of lay members on the Society's Council.

ANDREA ROBINSON said that pharmacists have to have the public's confidence and if that means having more lay members on the Society's Council then "that is perfectly in order".

TREFOR WILLIAMS commented that increasing the number of lay members for the function of representing the public's interests must be right.

"If you are frightened about lay people advising you then what are you trying to hide?" asked KEITH BRAIN. "Being open is the best protection."

DIGBY EMSON said that the SGM is a good thing and will be a useful contribution to the public debate on these issues, particularly with respect to the charter. "But it is hard to get lots of people into one room — the debate needs to be wider," he added.

PHARMACY TECHNICIANS

The developing role of pharmacy technicians and support staff was also discussed during the question and answer session. Stu-

dents asked members of the panel for their views on the registration and regulation of pharmacy technicians.

ANDREW BUXTON said that an important question regarding registration is whom to register. "The PSNC believes that there needs to be some form of regulation but registration should be aimed at accredited checking technicians," he said.

Mrs ROBINSON said: "We are obviously going to go through huge changes in the way that we practise over the next five to 10 years and it is essential that we have the right building blocks in place. Regulation of the environment in which we practise is crucially important."

Mr WILLIAMS warned students that they have to be aware that the buck will always stop with pharmacists, and rightly so. "The idea that having qualified or registered technicians, or both, will diminish your responsibility and increase theirs is rubbish," he said.

Dr BRAIN expressed concern that the exponential growth in schools of pharmacy will result in oversupply of pharmacists. "If you are increasing the role of technicians it seems to me you are going to have a head-on collision," he said.

Earlier in the day, a motion that pharmacy technicians should be registered with and regulated by an appropriate professional body was passed with a large majority.

Reckitt Benckiser pharmacy student of the year award presented to Helen Badham



Helen Badham, a third-year student at the Welsh School of Pharmacy, Cardiff University, is the winner of this year's Reckitt Benckiser "Pharmacy student of the

year" award. She has won a trip to the International Pharmaceutical Students Federation congress in Singapore in August.

The awards ceremony took place in the banquet hall at Cardiff Castle where conference participants were entertained with traditional Welsh folk songs sung by the Vivace choir.

There were 606 entries to the competition and the six finalists all received a copy of the 'Handbook of pharmacy healthcare'. In addition, the two runners up, Ann Marie Kenny, Robert Gordon University, and Rishi Gupta, University of Bradford, received a copy of 'Martindale'.

The picture shows Helen Badham (right) receiving her award from Linda Stone, member of Council, Royal Pharmaceutical Society.

Patient counselling competition winner

Four students reached the final of the Johnson & Johnson MSD patient counselling competition, each having won school of pharmacy and regional heats.

The winner of the competition this year is Marian Reilly, a third-year student at the University of Bradford.

Tim Jordan, field training manager, Johnson & Johnson MSD, presented Ms Reilly with her prize at the conference. He said: "The competition was very tough. Each of the finalists had their own strengths but Marian gave the best all round performance."

Campaign against university top-up fees

The BPSA executive should lobby the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and other pharmacy bodies to campaign against the implementation of university top-up fees and to propose an alternative solution to funding problems, according to students at the conference.

SCOTT DALGLEISH, ex-Strathclyde, who proposed the motion, said that most degree courses are three years, therefore a pharmacy degree will be relatively expensive to complete. He added that, compared with other professions, salaries for newly qualified pharmacists are not high enough to pay back loans.

MIKE HARRISON, Cardiff, pointed out that since such a large proportion of the population now attend university funding for higher education needs to come from somewhere.

RISHI JASSAL, Bath, said that the BPSA should lobby the Society so that if at any point it is asked to vote on top-up fees then it will know what the BPSA's opinion is.

The motion was carried with 113 votes for and two against.

Top-up fees were also raised during a question and answer session. KEITH BRAIN said: "At the moment there are good employment prospects in pharmacy and you have a good chance of being able to pay back a loan without difficulty." Regarding differential fees, he said: "It is very much like shopping . . . some schools of pharmacy will be cheaper but you may not get the best return at the end of the day."

Mr JASSAL, Bath, commented that if education is treated as a consumer item then it will be bad for universities and bad for students.

Elizabeth Doran is elected as the new president of BPSA

Elizabeth Doran, a preregistration trainee at Northwick Park Hospital, London, was elected as the new president of the BPSA on 18 April. Ms Doran has been public relations officer for the past two years.

Anna Watson, a fourth-year student at Cardiff University, was elected vice-president.

Andy Christopherson, ex-Strathclyde and outgoing president of the BPSA, was appointed an honorary life member.

CHARITY PUB CRAWL

Participants at the conference raised over £1,850 for Ty Hafan, a children's hospice in Wales, during a charity pub crawl and auction.