

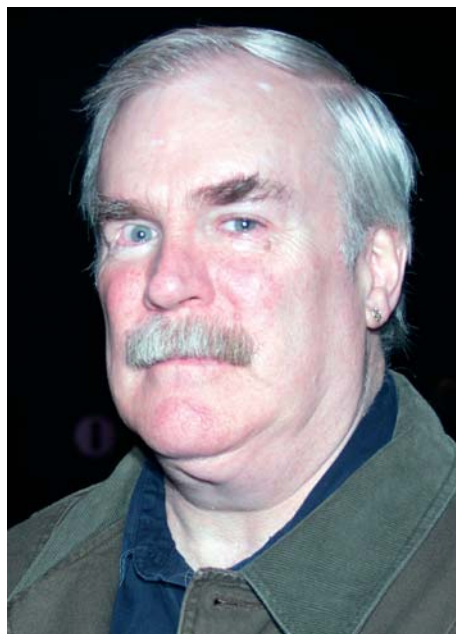
Patient empowerment — is it a new approach or just this year's buzzword?

A recent meeting heard that patients should be empowered to make informed decisions that are clinically effective. **Steven Kayne** reports

Most health care delivery systems are poorly configured to treat chronic diseases such as diabetes effectively, according to Robert Anderson of the Department of Medical Education, University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor. Health professionals are well trained to deliver episodic symptom-driven care but often struggle with the treatment of chronic disease for which they have little direct control once the consultation has ended. In these cases daily care is largely in the hands of the patient.

Professor Anderson was delivering the newly instigated J. J. R. MacLeod Lecture at the conference. He said that pharmacists were often frustrated and discouraged when patients did not follow their advice. In spite of the great advances that have been made in the treatment of diabetes in recent years, many patients still experienced devastating complications that cause a decrease in the length and quality of life and cost the health system money.

This can happen when the self-management plan has been designed to fit the requirements of a patient's disease but without considering his or her culture, lifestyle, per-



Robert Anderson: show you care about patients first and their diabetes second

sonal goals, priorities and resources. To manage diabetes successfully, patients must be empowered to set goals and make informed decisions that are clinically effective and satisfy complex personal psychosocial needs. It is necessary to establish a partnership with patients and their families to develop a collaborative approach.

Professor Anderson said that we should show that we care about our patients as individuals first and about their diabetes second. Intervention strategies should encourage patients to assume day-to-day responsibility for their diabetes care. Professor Anderson outlined a five-step process similar to continuing professional development, involving the provision of information and guidance through a reflective process designed to facilitate the development of both diabetes- and lifestyle-related goals. Patients are then invited to adopt an appropriate behavioural change consistent with the achievement of their chosen long-term goals and to evaluate their efforts after an agreed period.

Important OTC advice role

In a workshop that highlighted the potential problems associated with over-the-counter medicines, Margaret Ryan, head of prescribing management, NHS Argyll and Clyde, described community pharmacists' important role in identifying potential interactions and inappropriate self-treatment.

A number of common OTC products can interfere with blood glucose control, she said. Many diabetic patients are taking drugs for other related conditions and need guidance. The availability of so many variants with similar brand names causes confusion for many patients, who should be encouraged to read the label carefully.

The "Diabetes in Scotland 2004" conference was jointly organised by **Diabetes UK** and the **Scottish Executive** (Government) and took place in Glasgow on 12 November

Society membership groups

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society has established special interest groups for community pharmacists, for veterinary pharmacists, for industrial, regulatory and technical pharmacists, for hospital pharmacists and for pharmacy academic staff. The groups hold meetings to consider topics of interest within their own fields of practice and they provide a source of advice to the Society's Council on specialist matters. Details of the groups can be obtained from the Society. Contact details are given below.

Community Pharmacists Group The Community Pharmacists Group, formed at the beginning of 1994, is open to all pharmacists engaged in the practice of community pharmacy. The group committee has the discretion to grant membership to pharmacists who are not engaged in community pharmacy practice but who have a direct involvement or demonstrable interest in that aspect of pharmacy. Contact: Ann Harrington, practice division (tel 020 7572 2411; e-mail ann.harrington@rpsgb.org).

Veterinary Pharmacists Group The Veterinary Pharmacists Group is open to all pharmacists who are engaged in, or actively considering engaging in, the preparation or supply of agricultural chemicals, veterinary medicines and allied products. Other pharmacists may be granted membership at the discretion of the group committee. Contact: Lorraine Fearon, practice division (tel 020 7572 2409; e-mail lorraine.fearon@rpsgb.org).

Industrial Pharmacists Group The Industrial Pharmacists Group is for pharmacists who are engaged in industrial practice, those who act as consultants to industry, those whose work is concerned substantially with questions of industrial pharmaceutical practice and those whose work concerns, or who have an interest in, industrial, regulatory or technical matters affecting pharmacy. Contact: Ann Harrington, practice division (tel 020 7572 2411; e-mail ann.harrington@rpsgb.org).

Hospital Pharmacists Group The Hospital Pharmacists Group is for pharmacists who work in NHS, private or armed forces hospitals and those employed by, or acting as consultants to, NHS health authorities, health boards and trusts. Also eligible are pharmacists working in the prison service, community pharmacists seconded to provide a service within a private hospital and other pharmacists whose work is significantly concerned with matters relating to the practice of hospital pharmacy. Contact: Lorraine Fearon, practice division (tel 020 7572 2409; e-mail lorraine.fearon@rpsgb.org).

Academic Pharmacy Group The Academic Pharmacy Group is open to pharmacists and other academic staff who make a significant contribution to pharmacy teaching and research in a UK school of pharmacy or a recognised pharmacy academic practice unit. Contact: Zoe Whittington, research and development division (tel 020 7572 2276; e-mail zoe.whittington@rpsgb.org).