

# Pharmacists should remain on site

Students at this year's British Pharmaceutical Student's Association conference voiced concerns about being responsible for a pharmacy in which they were not physically present. The content of the MPharm degree and preregistration training were also debated. **Hannah Pike** reports

Pharmacists should remain on their premises or have another suitable method of supervision at all times during the course of pharmacy business.

This was a motion proposed at this year's British Pharmaceutical Student's Association annual conference, held in Nottingham last week.

After the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee accepted that pharmacists may leave their premises for a short period (*PJ*, 19 March, p323) Richard Taggart, a third-year student at Manchester University, proposed the motion, saying that he is not comfortable with the idea of the pharmacist being ultimately responsible for what is going on in a dispensary in which he or she is not present. Deborah Hallsworth, Aston, agreed, saying that if the pharmacist is not physically present he or she cannot keep an ear out for what is going on.

However, Yvonne Lee, London School of Pharmacy, pointed out that if proper standard operating procedures are in place and staff are

reliable then it should not make a difference if the pharmacist is physically present or not. Elizabeth Doran, immediate past president of the BPSA, noted that counter staff are not paid for taking on this extra responsibility.

Edward Thomas, Manchester, said that pharmacists need to move with the times and allow for future developments. He added that there is a growing interest in internet pharmacy where the pharmacist may not be present. Richard Ketley, Aston, asked how patients would feel if their doctor was to delegate his duties and leave the surgery, and why it should be any different for pharmacists.

Overall, students were worried about being professionally accountable for something that took place when they were not



Pharmacy students voiced opinions on current issues

there, and that the public image of the pharmacist may be adversely affected by their absence from the pharmacy. The motion was carried.

At last year's conference, BPSA students had divided opinion about whether remote supervision was a good idea and no conclusion was reached (*PJ*, 17 April 2004, p480).

## Review of pharmacy education suggested

A key issue that has been brought to light this week is that pharmacy students want a review of their undergraduate education, James Wood, president of the BPSA, said.

The skills required of pharmacists with the introduction of the new community pharmacy contract were a recurring theme during many of the debates, and delegates frequently stated the need for a review of undergraduate training. They want training that is more appropriate to prepare them to be supplementary or independent prescribers, more multidisciplinary working and management training (*PJ*, 26 March, p354).

Students heard a presentation by Joy Wingfield, professor of pharmacy law and ethics at Nottingham University, on the advancing the provision of pharmacy law and ethics teaching project. The students participated in workshops on the subject and later in the week voted to carry a motion that there should be an overhaul of the teaching of law and ethics in the MPharm degree, to include the curriculum recommended by the APLET project.

The British Pharmaceutical Students Association 63rd annual conference took place at Nottingham University, from 19–26 March

## Students want more industry placements

The pharmaceutical industry should be encouraged to offer more pharmacy preregistration trainee places, students agreed.

Alexander Fischer, Portsmouth, proposed this motion saying that, despite the industry being an important part of the profession, many pharmacists may not consider it as a viable career option owing to a lack of placements.

Other delegates voiced concerns that pharmacy graduates are in direct competition with other science graduates for many industry jobs and that the lack of pharmacists in these positions will lead to a shortage of preregistration tutors in industry in the future. They suggested that if students become despondent about their chances in industry they may consider giving up pharmacy and pursuing alternative careers.

### Some of the other issues debated at the BPSA conference

#### Motions carried

- The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency should improve the speed of communication with pharmacists with regard to drug recalls
- Screening for certain sexually transmitted infections should be made available in all pharmacies
- The BPSA should fully support the Government's decision to review the classification of cannabis from class C to class B
- Prospective employers should include a section on the preregistration application form to ascertain whether an applicant has taken part in the BPSA Professional Development Certificate scheme
- There should be a professional obligation for preregistration tutors, included in the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's code of ethics to take on and train a preregistration trainee for the stated training period
- The BPSA executive should improve the association's link with the student bodies of other health care professions

#### Motions not carried

- Herbal medicines that have clinically significant interactions with other medicines, eg, St John's wort, should be reclassified as P medicines so that they can be sold under the supervision of a pharmacist
- When applying for a preregistration placement there should be no obligation to have worked for the company before

## Delay collection of preregistration fee

Preregistration fees should not have to be paid by pharmacy graduates until preregistration employment commences.

So proposed Amy Lepiorz, a fourth-year student at Sunderland University. Currently, the fee is payable six to eight weeks before a placement is taken up and when the notification of the placement is given to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, which is normally before salaried employment has started.

Rebecca Bourn, Bradford, pointed out that in their final year the last student loan instalment received is also lower, adding to the financial pressures placed on students.

Edward Thomas, Manchester, said that since the fee registers the student as a preregistration trainee it would not be possible to start the preregistration year without paying it. He suggested that students start planning this fee earlier into their budgets, possibly over a period of a few years.

Peter Burley, head of preregistration at the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, pointed out that both the level of the fee and the timing of the preregistration cycle are set by the Council and relate to the byelaws.

Mr Burley said there are practical problems with separating the fee from the notification such as the fact that the fee helps pay for materials trainees need at the start of their training, and that extra work would be created by recording the start of the placement separately from collection of the fee. He said that paying the fee later would result in additional costs, which could only be recovered by increasing the fee.

Mr Burley suggested that it would be more practical to approach those pharmacies who do not pay the fee on behalf of their trainees to ask them to reconsider their policy.

However, students were not convinced and, following the vote, the motion to delay payment of the fee was carried.

## Pharmacy student of the year



This year's Reckitt Benckiser "Pharmacy student of the year" award was won by Nisha Thakrar, a fourth-year student at Nottingham University. She is pictured above with Nicholas Wood, president of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (left), and James Wood, president of the BPSA.

Miss Thakrar, who is also the BPSA's student exchange officer, and BPSA vice-president elect, beat over 300 applicants to win attendance at the International Pharmaceutical Students Federation annual congress in Bonn, Germany, in August. She also received a copy of 'Martindale' and 'Handbook of pharmacy healthcare'. Miss Thakrar has accepted a preregistration trainee position at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, London, and is due to start this summer.

Runners up of the competition were Kenneth Chan, a first-year student at Kingston University, and Thomas Wyllie, a fourth-year student at Nottingham University.

## Review generic packaging to reduce errors

Packaging of generic products should be reviewed with particular regard to marked similarities between different medicines and strengths in an attempt to reduce dispensing errors, BPSA delegates agreed.

Students were concerned about how easy

it is to mix up generic products that have similar packaging, and noted that the use of different colours for different drugs as well as strengths would be useful not just for the pharmacist, but for all members of staff, such as those unpacking the daily order.

## Patient counselling competition winner



Gemma Timbers (pictured left), a third-year student from the University of Nottingham School of Pharmacy, was the winner of the McNeil "Responding to symptoms" competition. She received £250.

Other finalists were Richard Ketley, Aston, Bahijja Raima-Abraham, East Anglia and Martin McKeag, from Robert Gordon, Aberdeen.

Nicola Shaw, Bradford, was the winner of the BPSA/Provincial Pharmacy Locum Services travel competition. Ms Shaw who is currently undertaking a preregistration placement at the National Pharmaceutical Association, won £1,000 financial support towards a visit to Sri Lanka. Ms Shaw plans to examine health care provision since the Tsunami on December 26 last year.

## BPSA election results

Gautam Paul, ex-Aston, was elected the next BPSA president. Mr Paul was this year's BPSA secretary general and is currently doing his preregistration training at the University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust. Nisha Thakrar was elected vice-president. James Wood was made an honorary life member of the association.

## Charity pub crawl

BPSA students raised about £1,000 for the charity Help the Hospices by holding a fancy dress pub crawl and auctioning donated items.