

Public praises pharmacy, says Minister

Community pharmacists gathered for the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee's 2005 Community Pharmacy Conference have been told that they must not miss the opportunities for service development offered by their new contract with the NHS. **Mike Thompson** reports

Community pharmacies have been praised in the early stages of the Department of Health's "Your health, your care, your say" listening exercise.

Health minister Jane Kennedy said that although the consultation was concentrating on people's perceptions of services in GP surgeries, people had been saying that they thought that pharmacists in particular did a good job.

The resulting White Paper would be central to modernising service delivery in primary care and the role of community

pharmacies was recognised and valued, the minister said.

Although not all modernisation was wholeheartedly welcomed (reimbursement rules on patient packs, branded generics and control of entry were three areas the minister mentioned) Ms Kennedy said that she had no apology to make. All the reforms served one purpose alone — to improve patient choice, to improve convenient access and to support the shift the new contract promised towards measurable improvements in the quality of services from pharmacies.

"Patient expectations of a high quality service continue to rise," the minister concluded. "That is why the quality of services you provide must continue to match those expectations head on. The time is right for you to be recognised first and foremost as providers of clinical services, not as simply another high street retailer. It is the quality of those services which will be the hallmark of your excellence, making you recognised as leaders and innovators in service provision and a most easily accessible and highly trusted source of health care advice and support."

Community pharmacy must be in at the beginning of the reorganisation of primary care

Local pharmaceutical committees must make sure that community pharmacy does not lose out as the latest reorganisation of NHS primary care gets under way.

That was the message delivered by PSNC chief executive Sue Sharpe in the context of the start of practice-based commissioning and primary care trust mergers.

"It could not have come at a worse time," Mrs Sharpe told the conference. "Around the country, PCTs and PCT pharmaceutical advisers are uncertain about how they are going to be organised and about future employ-

ment," she said. "This really will not help the NHS make the most of the contribution that we can offer."

The reorganisation of PCTs was already acting as a brake on progress and would have an adverse impact on the development of enhanced services in some areas over the next 18 months.

But she said that the advent of practice-based commissioning could offer a real opportunity for pharmacy.

"Pharmacy must ensure that it is in there at the beginning," Mrs Sharpe said.

Fundamental issues remain in pharmacy

Fundamental issues need to be addressed now that the new pharmacy contract in England is fully implemented, according to PSNC chairman Barry Andrews.

They are:

- How to focus on what pharmacy can do
- How to avoid marginalising pharmacy while local health authorities grapple with change
- How to ensure that the opportunities of the new contract are fully utilised

"We must not underestimate the change that we are making," Mr Andrews warned. "It is not just a change in the details of the service; not even a change in the services. It is a change of culture for pharmacists."

Advanced services are the key to the future

Advanced services under the new pharmacy contract, such as medicines use reviews and prescription interventions, are the key to the future of community pharmacy, was the message from Alastair Buxton, head of NHS services at the PSNC.

"It is very, very, important that we deliver on advanced services," Mr Buxton said. "Advanced services are our first step on the clinical ladder."

He went on: "We must work more closely with GP surgeries, not only to optimise treatment, but to move appropriate services from secondary to primary care. Working together at a local level will be a good start."

During discussion, Martin Mandelbaum, secretary of West Surrey Local Pharma-

ceutical Committee, said that GPs were hostile towards pharmacists carrying out MURs and had said that they would not have pharmacists telling them how to prescribe or manage patients medicines.

Felicity Cox, chief executive of Watford and Three Rivers PCT and Dacorum PCT, said that if pharmacists showed GPs how they could make drug cost savings they would be interested. If they were not, then PCTs should be told.

Mala Rao, head of public health workforce and capacity at the Department of Health, said that joined-up thinking was still lacking. Problems with MURs, should be reported to the "Choosing health through pharmacy" implementation group, which she chaired.

Robbie Turner, Leeds LPC, asked why the PSNC had not designed some model enhanced services.

Mr Buxton said that the PSNC had provided model service specification, but that there was a cycle of spoon-feeding among pharmacists that had to be broken.

Safety reports rise

Community pharmacists are reporting increasing numbers of incidents to the National Patient Safety Agency, but reporting of serious incidents remains low, Wendy Harris, head of safety solutions at the NPSA, said.

This could be because few serious incidents involved community pharmacy (there had, however, been one death) or because pharmacists were not confident to report them. However, the quality of reports from community pharmacists was good. But two essential elements — the manufacturer of the medication involved and what actually happened to the patient — were often missing. Ms Harris said that the NPSA was currently working with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society on how pharmacists would be expected to report incidents and how the Society would then treat those pharmacists.

The 2005 Community Pharmacy Conference organised by The Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee took place at the International convention centre, Manchester.