

Make your voice heard, students told

The role pharmacy students might play within a prospective royal college was discussed at a recent conference. **Matthew Wright** reports

Pharmacy students are the future of the profession and need to have a say about their involvement in a future professional leadership body, David Pruce, director of practice and quality improvement at the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, told British Pharmaceutical Students' Association members at its annual conference.

Mr Pruce told participants that the Society believes it is uniquely placed to form the royal college: "We've got the infrastructure, we've got the history to build on. But what we recognise is that we can't do that on our own. So we intend to work with other bodies, particularly BPSA, because you're the future . . . the ones who will be delivering this vision."

Mr Pruce took BPSA members through some of the background behind the Government's proposed changes to the regulation of health professionals, pointing out that the Government has decided that regulation must be separate in the form of a General Pharmaceutical Council. He told participants: "The Carter working party is going to report in April. It's been a hectic three months to get us to a stage where we have a good idea what the GPC might look like and a vague idea of what the royal college might look like." He said that, over the coming months, there would be further refining of what the royal college will look like, what it is going to do, and how it will differ from the Society.

"We don't expect the GPC to be set up for probably three years, which gives us the chance to get . . . the royal college right," he added.

He reinforced the view that today's students will be tomorrow's leaders of the profession: "You're going to be our future clinicians in hospital and in community pharmacy. You're our future scientists, our future academics and, particularly, our future leaders. And a royal college should be something that supports you from the very beginning, that should publicise your achievements. . . . You will add to the collective knowledge of the college and over time you will be the ones directing what the college does."

He went on: "It should be your royal college, it should be something that you want to join and that you want to lead. It should play an important part in your professional development from the moment you decide to do pharmacy to the moment you decide to come off the register. Make sure your voice is heard. . . . This is your opportunity to be in, at the beginning, something that I think will be very exciting."

Mr Pruce told BPSA members that he did not think that it would be compulsory to join the future royal college. "It will be compulsory to join the GPC if you want to be a pharmacist," he said, "but it will be for you to decide that you want to join the royal college because you get something out of it."

Mr Pruce was asked whether membership fees would change when the royal college and registering bodies are formed. He said: "Almost certainly . . . you would have to pay to join [a royal college] and you would have to pay to join the GPC. And yes, I expect the fees to go up over time. Revalidation is not going to be cheap: it is going to be something



David Pruce: a royal college should be something that you want to join

that has to be done and has to be paid for, regrettably." He said that there would be two fees and that, although the Society does not yet know what the costs will be, it could be more than what pharmacists currently pay.

Mr Pruce was asked how the Society sees the BPSA's involvement in a new royal college. He responded: "It is in your court, which is why I encourage you to think about it — what sort of relationship do you want?" He said that the Society understands that pharmacy students and the BPSA are vitally important, but that to a certain extent it is up to BPSA members to consider whether to be a faculty of, or associated with, the professional leadership body.

Students vote for BPSA to become a faculty

Conference participants voted unanimously to accept a motion that the BPSA become a faculty of the body akin to a royal college under the proposed White Paper changes (*PJ*, 14 April, p417).

The motion was put forward by Chris Barnes, BPSA public relations officer, ex-Bradford, and seconded by James Wood, a former president and honorary life member of the association.

Some participants raised concerns that being part of a royal college might restrict opportunities for the BPSA. But Mr Barnes stressed that, rather than restricting the BPSA's activities, being part of the royal college could provide many more opportunities

for the association. He explained: "We would be able to be an integral part of how the royal college is actually formed and taken forward.

"But also I think we would have the weight of what's probably going to turn out to be quite a large organisation behind us, to try to determine policy and also to give better services and better opportunities for our members," he added.

Jennifer de Val, BPSA president and recently qualified pharmacist at Barts and The London NHS Trust, pointed out that, with membership of a future royal college likely to be voluntary, the college will need to have pharmacy students on board.

She added: "We need to say what we think and get what we want out of it. If we are passive, we will just get left behind. It makes sense that students engage with this exciting time in pharmacy."

Leadership qualities under the spotlight

Anne Adams, head of professional leadership at the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, spoke about the ways in which leadership varies from management and how pharmacists can develop their leadership skills.

Mrs Adams said that pharmacists generally do not put themselves forward for management and leadership programmes and that pharmacists are not always at the top of the list to be put forward for such programmes.

She advised participants to become familiar with the NHS Leadership Qualities Framework developed for use within the NHS in England. She suggested that, to begin with, delegates could look at "personal qualities" that underpin good leadership within the framework. These include self belief, self awareness, self management, drive for improvement and personal integrity.

The British Pharmaceutical Students' Association annual conference took place at the University of Manchester from 31 March to 7 April.

Panel questioned about technician representation

Panel guests were asked for their views on the inclusion of pharmacy technicians in a future royal college-type body at a question and answer session, chaired by Digby Emson, Company Chemists Association chairman.

Rachel Kelly, a senior clinical pharmacy technician at Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Hospitals NHS Trust, pointed out that registration of pharmacy technicians reflects the setting and maintaining standards of pharmacy services for patients, and agreed that technicians should be part of a future professional leadership body.

Brian Dougherty, Specials Laboratory chairman, emphasised that technicians provide important support for pharmacist roles, particularly within industry. "They are integral to everything that we do. It is important that we look after them and represent them professionally," he said.

Sukhjit Grewal, member liaison manager, National Pharmacy Association, said there needs to be an appropriate voice for pharmacy technicians and it should form part of a unified body. "Issues around continuing professional development, law and ethics are similar for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians," he told participants.

Panel guests were asked whether the pre-registration training year should be integrated into the pharmacy degree across the board.



Members of the question and answer panel, from left: Richard Hey, Sukhjit Grewal, Rachel Kelly, Brian Dougherty, Karen Rice and Elizabeth Horncastle

There would be significant practical difficulties associated with having the preregistration training year integrated into the MPharm degree, including the shortfall in preregistration places over the short term, Richard Hey, director of pharmacy, Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Hospitals NHS Trust, told participants.

"It is a good idea," said Karen Rice, business development manager and co-superintendent pharmacist, The Cohens Group, "but the practicalities of it are quite difficult from a community pharmacy perspective."

Chris Barnes, BPSA public relations officer and recently qualified pharmacist, said:

"As an ex-student of Bradford University, . . . the 'sandwich course', I felt, was an excellent opportunity to be able to spend six months in two different sectors of pharmacy."

Elizabeth Horncastle, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's preregistration training facilitator for the north of England, said: "Certainly the number of preregistration premises that are approved for training in the community has risen. A lot of that is thanks to an increase in the training grant. We're still at a position where I don't know of anyone who hasn't found a preregistration training place — the problem tends to be that it might not be the location that you want."

Student of the year prize awarded



Jared Ching (pictured, left, with John D'Arcy, National Pharmacy Association chief executive), a third-year pharmacy student from the University of East Anglia, was pronounced winner of this year's "Pharmacy student of the year" award, sponsored by Reckitt Benckiser. The prize is attendance at the International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation congress in Taipei, Taiwan, this August (<http://ipsf2007.org>).

Mr Ching was later elected editor of the BPSA's *Future Pharmacist* publication at the conference.

Jamie Wilkinson, a first-year student at Kingston University school of pharmacy and chemistry, was the runner up.

Association seeks closer ties with Northern Ireland student body

The BPSA should start to develop relationships with Queen's University, Belfast. This motion, proposed by Heena Bakta, BPSA membership secretary and a student at Bradford University school of pharmacy, and seconded by Ryan Hamilton, school of pharmacy and chemistry, Liverpool John Moores University, had strong support and was carried.

Ms Bakta said that, because there is the possibility that the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland could become part of a future royal college, it would make sense to now approach the student association in Northern Ireland. Participants opposing the motion were of the opinion that the PSNI should forge closer links with the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland.

Financial support Participants voted to carry a motion that schools of pharmacy should be encouraged to support their students financially when taking part in BPSA activities such as student exchange programmes.

Heena Bakta elected president

Heena Bakta, fifth-year student, Bradford, and current BPSA membership secretary, was elected the next BPSA president. Jing Hu, a third-year student at London School of Pharmacy, was elected vice-president.

Amanda King, membership manager at the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, was made an honorary life member of the BPSA (see **Society** p470), as was Jennifer de Val, current president, and Amy Lepiorz, current vice-president.