

What does the future hold?

Shaping the future for technicians, as a part of the wider pharmacy profession, was one of the main themes of the APTUK conference. Rachel Graham reports

Recent changes to health care legislation present a tremendous opportunity for the pharmacy profession, according to Carwen Wynne Howells, chief pharmaceutical adviser for Wales. "All the stepping stones are in place," she said, for pharmacy to grasp the clinical role it has been seeking.

Miss Wynne Howells said that changes brought about by the Health Act 2006 would alter the definition of "personal control" and "supervision", impacting on skill mix.

Turning to the proposed formation of a royal college-type body, Miss Wynne Howells said that it is her personal opinion that a royal college of pharmacy (ie, not exclusive to pharmacists) should be formed. This is an opportunity for technicians to say "we want to join the party", she said, and is in line with the inclusive nature of the Welsh Assembly Government's pharmacy strategy for Wales.

Miss Wynne Howells also said that the regulation of pharmacy technicians would enable role development in a structured way, and that she supported the development of higher level qualifications (eg, to degree level) for those wishing to advance their practice.

Barriers to developing the potential of technicians include a lack of investment in services to enable the best use of skill mix



Sarah Wilcox: keep up to date with recent changes

and a lack of willingness among some technicians to transfer their skills to new roles, because of a lack of confidence, she said.

Also speaking at the conference, Sarah Wilcox, president of APTUK and pharmacy technician training lead at the University Hospitals of Wales, Cardiff, stressed that, as well as bringing opportunities, the recent changes to health care law mean that APTUK will need to change. She asked pharmacy technicians to let her know their thoughts about where the organisation



Carwen Wynne Howells: all the stepping stones are in place

should fit into a royal college-type structure and whether APTUK should be involved, for example, in issues such as pay and conditions — a role which will not be in the remit of a royal college-type body.

Mrs Wilcox also encouraged technicians to keep up to date with recent changes, so they can assess their impact. She urged them to register with the Society and influence how their profession develops. "The more technicians registered, the louder the voice," she concluded.

Get involved in Pharmacy 2020

Technicians have a key role in shaping the pharmacy profession for 2020, according to Michele Savage, manager of the Society's Pharmacy 2020 project.

Ms Savage explained that Pharmacy 2020 is the successor to the Pharmacy In a New Age (PIANA) project, the outcomes of which are reflected in Department of Health documents such as "Pharmacy in the future." As with PIANA, the project involves extensive consultation with the profession.

The Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK conference, entitled "Celebrating diversity", was held in Birmingham on 19–22 April. **Rachel Graham** is writer and contributions editor at *Hospital Pharmacist*. Coverage will continue in next month's issue.

As part of the consultation process, Ms Savage said she would like to hear from technicians about, for example, what prevents them from being the pharmacy team member that they would ideally like to be. Impromptu responses from technicians at the conference included that differences in training and qualifications for technicians (including of the same grade) meant that many pharmacists were unaware of the knowledge-base of individual technicians. Entrenched attitudes (of both pharmacists and technicians) and a lack of resources were also cited. The development of practice frameworks for pharmacists and technicians, so that the former knew when they could delegate to the latter, and a standardisation of technician qualifications, were suggested as methods to help overcome these barriers.

More than 5,200 technicians are now registered

At the time of the APTUK conference, 5,239 pharmacy technicians had registered with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. This statistic was among those presented by Janet Flint, head of support staff regulation at the Society.

Technicians working in hospitals account for almost a quarter (22 per cent) of those registered, with technicians working for community pharmacy and primary care organisations accounting for 69 and 5 per cent, respectively. Based on these figures, Mrs Flint predicts that the final register, when registration becomes statutory, will contain in the region of 16,000 names.