

Turk talks White Paper and NPA plans

John Turk, the new chief executive of the National Pharmacy Association, talks to Dawn Connelly about the opportunities and challenges within England's pharmacy White Paper and his plans for the NPA

Serve to lead — this is the philosophy that new National Pharmacy Association chief executive John Turk believes the organisation should adopt. "I want members to perceive us as a strong organisation, which is very clear about its purpose on their behalf, is innovative and entrepreneurial on their behalf, and has pace," he explains.

To achieve this, the NPA needs to have a leadership role, argues Mr Turk. "The NPA derives its strength from its membership and therefore it must be strong on behalf of the membership. I want to be perceived as leading a purposeful organisation that people respect and feel is friendly and very much on their side," he says.

However, Mr Turk is confident that the NPA's leadership role will not clash with that of the new professional leadership body. "Currently our role is to be a strong advocate for community pharmacy as a trade association," he explains. This, he says, involves dealing with all of the issues that community pharmacy faces, including professional, wider healthcare and business concerns. "If you take other arenas outside healthcare, there are professional bodies and trade associations happily living in harmony together," he points out. But he adds: "In terms of how it will all fit together and what all of our roles are will be clarified over time."

He predicts that all pharmacy bodies will go through changes over the next 18 months and will need to get together to work out how to move forward. "If we want to be strong as pharmacists everybody involved needs to work together," he believes.

Breadth of experience

Mr Turk's love of healthcare began immediately after university, when he did a short service commission in the army. "Some of what I did was public health but from the engineering sense," he says. He was involved in the provision of ventilated pit latrines in third world countries.

Since then, Mr Turk has acquired a breadth of experience in the healthcare field, which he feels he can draw on in his new role. He was involved in product development and dealt with supply chain issues during five years with SmithKline Beecham. He then moved on to Gambro AB — a medical technology company — where he ran his own distribution centre. And from Gambro he made the transition into health service delivery with Care UK (see Panel).

"I have moved from product delivery — and by that I am drawing a parallel with pharmacy dispensing — to delivering healthcare services. So I have been through the challenge which community pharmacy is going



John Turk

John Turk took up his post as chief executive of the National Pharmacy Association on 7 April. He joined the organisation from health and social care provider Care UK, where he created and directed the 400-employee children's services division.

Mr Turk completed an MBA before starting his commercial career with SmithKline Beecham (now GlaxoSmithKline). His 18-year senior management career includes an appointment as the managing director of Gambro AB.

Mr Turk lives with his wife and three children in St Albans, Hertfordshire. He enjoys running marathons, his first being in New York in 2004 and subsequently in London in 2007. Next year's challenge is the Kokodo trail in Papua New Guinea, a 100km trek through inhospitable jungle terrain.

through now in terms of moving from primarily a dispensing role to a healthcare service delivery role," he explains.

He also has a lot of experience of contracting within the NHS, which he believes will stand him in good stead as proposals in the White Paper are implemented. For example, at Care UK he was involved in joining up health and social care provision. "That was very much about service provision — so how do we contract with primary care trusts and the local authority to specify the services, commission them and deliver them? There is a direct parallel [there] with what is taking place through the White Paper," he says.

Mr Turk believes that one of the biggest challenges in the White Paper is how community pharmacies, even those that are part

of multiples, interact with local PCTs. "We are moving away from the national contract negotiations to delivering local services, which need to be negotiated locally. And that is something that, as the NPA, we need to help community pharmacy develop the skills for," he says.

Fair funding

Mr Turk believes that part of the NPA's role is to help make the White Paper proposals happen. He indicates that a big challenge for the NPA will be lobbying for the right resources to be put in place.

"Services are delivered by people and therefore there is a requirement for potentially more people to deliver a service, and there is a cost associated with that. It is fundamental to make sure that community pharmacy is being fairly rewarded for the services and the infrastructure that they need to be able to put in place to support that," he stresses.

However, he points out that the implications of the White Paper go wider than pharmacy. "We can contract but we need somebody to be able to contract with. Are PCTs prepared and do they have the right resources? Are they giving this the right level of priority to enable it to happen? And, therefore, is the Department of Health ensuring that this is given priority on the contracting side," he asks.

Measuring quality

Another challenge for the NPA is how it can help pharmacists to measure the quality of the new services they provide. "How can we help community pharmacy to provide the outcome information that can then go back to PCTs to demonstrate the quality and the impact of that service, which in turn will help with ongoing negotiations and agreements," he asks.

Mr Turk's aim is that every category of NPA membership — from individual pharmacist owners to the multiples — will feel fully engaged and supported by the organisation. He plans to achieve this by talking to members and maintaining a good intelligence network. "We already have connections with European bodies and the Government and we need to continually refresh and strengthen those, so that we really are involved and have a good understanding and a connection with everybody," he says.

Mr Turk plans to stay in the job as long as he is enjoying himself and believes he is adding value. "I have never been made to feel more welcome by an organisation and there is a whole raft of reasons why I am already enjoying this job and will continue to do so," he says.