

## THE INDUSTRY

## Can we have an evidence base?

From Ms S. M Frederick,  
MRPharmS

Another advance for medicine — how thrilling to read that the S-enantiomer of citalopram has just been launched (*PJ*, 22 June, p867). Patients have been queuing up to tell me how wonderful new isomers of drugs are compared with the boring old isomers they were forced to make do with until the patents ran out. If spin-doctoring pharmaceutical molecules really does confer patient benefit (as well as shareholders) can we have an evidence base please? Because no patient has told me of any improvement to date, and I am feeling more cynical about, and ashamed of, the pharmaceutical industry by the day.

Sue Frederick  
Maldon,  
Essex

## CANNABIS

## Ounces or grams?

From Mr J. A. McWilliam,  
MRPharmS

I wonder which one of our members will be the first to be prosecuted for supplying an ounce of hash — not because it was cannabis but because it was not supplied in grams.

James McWilliam  
East Kilbride,  
Glasgow

## SCIENCE IN PHARMACY

## Unbalanced and materialistic outlook

From Dr S. Pashley

I write as one who has retired from the register, but still enjoys reading his wife's *Journal*.

John Sharp (*PJ*, 20 July, p98) makes some sweeping assertions, and reveals a surprisingly unbalanced and materialistic outlook, in stating that science is the bedrock of all things and "They

[molecules] are the daily everything". He appears to reject any facet of existence other than scientific endeavour. He leaves no room for the spiritual, for the arts and humanities, or for human emotion and creativity.

Molecules may be everywhere, but for the overwhelming majority of people they do not feature at all in the daily round. I applaud the Nottingham roadshow for bringing enlightenment to the masses concerning these "odd things that occasionally impact upon everyday life".

Surely our response to the created world around us is of far more importance than inanimate chemicals per se.

Steve Pashley  
Aylesbury,  
Buckinghamshire

## ADR REPORTING

## MCA appreciates pharmacist reporting

From Mr J. Benouaich,  
MRPharmS

I would like to draw attention to a severe reaction experienced by an elderly woman after she had taken trimethoprim.

She developed a serious rash covering all parts of her body except her head. The rash disappeared after stopping trimethoprim.

I reported this reaction to the Medicines Control Agency and it replied that the report was very much appreciated. I would like to urge colleagues to be more co-

operative with the MCA — it appreciates pharmacists reporting adverse drug reactions. They are doing an extremely important job.

Jacob Benouaich  
Prestwich, Manchester

## SUPPORT STAFF

## Consultation period too short

From Professor H. McNulty,  
FRPharmS

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society's paper on regulating support staff (*PJ*, 22 June, p888) has only a three-week consultation period when usually two or three months are allowed. There are several consultation processes ongoing to dilute the time available and the holiday season is here. Many with knowledge and expertise will be unable to contribute on this important topic for pharmacy.

If we are to guarantee quality of pharmacy services we must establish professional regulation of support staff and many of the proposals are sensible. However, some questions asked (5,6 and 7) need background knowledge and information on the various qualification systems that few pharmacists have or can access. Other questions are missing such as: What standards are needed for experience and knowledge? What are the employer implications of the proposals? Can educational systems be in place to meet the Society's 2005 deadline? Is this a devolved issue?

We need a more reasonable consultation period and provision of further background information on the S/NVQ system and new level 2 and 3 course content for effective debate, to ensure that Helen Remington's group starts with useful comments and can progress quickly. I hope national interests will also be adequately represented round the group table — Scotland has much to offer the debate.

H McNulty  
Bearsden, Glasgow

## HONORARY AUDITORS

## A function well performed

From Mr A. G. M. Madge,  
FRPharmS

I must, especially as a former honorary auditor, commend Ian Caldwell on his comprehensive and erudite article on the problematic future of the modernisation process of the Society (*PJ*, 13 July, p81). It has the wisdom of our forebears who saw the necessity of control on finances and accountability to the membership. This function has been well performed by the honorary auditors over the years, especially with the power of inspection and "asking questions" to their satisfaction. The right of the membership to be eligible for election as honorary auditors was one of the basic principles of the pioneers of the Society.

The elected are drawn from all members irrespective of age, colour and creed. All sections make their contribution to the benefit of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and ultimate benefit of its members. Mr Caldwell rightly draws attention to the aspect of "establishment" gamekeepers turned poachers, various organisations without honorary auditors and few members attending annual general meetings, again portraying the responsibility of the honorary auditors.

Mervyn Madge  
Plymouth

## E-MAIL

E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address or membership number.

## ADVICE FOR CORRESPONDENTS

Letters for publication can be posted, faxed, or sent by e-mail to [letters@pbarmj.org.uk](mailto:letters@pbarmj.org.uk) and should not normally be of more than 400 words. The Journal reserves the right to abridge letters and to edit them for clarity and style. Pharmacist correspondents should supply their membership numbers and a contact telephone number should always be given. Women correspondents should specify a preferred title otherwise "Ms" will be used.

Letters are accepted for publication on the understanding that they have not appeared anywhere previously. If the issue is of such significance that the correspondent has simultaneously submitted the letter elsewhere, it is the responsibility of the correspondent to inform The Journal at the time.

Letters that are critical of individuals, organisations or companies may be sent to the person or body concerned so that they are given a simultaneous right of reply. In these instances, the authors' identities will not be disclosed until publication, and publication will usually be delayed.

Anonymity will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances. These circumstances will be at the discretion of the editor and the decision made in consultation with the correspondent.

## Let us retain our independence

From Mr D. W. M. Davidson,  
FRPharmS

Regulating health care professionals is an admirable and desirable objective. In achieving that objective for the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, might we not put the case for restructured subcommittees within existing frameworks to allow greater representation from users of pharmacy services and fellow health professionals?

Pharmacy cannot ignore its past. It should continue to evolve from the solid, tried and trusted base it has established over the years rather than be forced to undergo revolutionary professional development devised by bureaucrats. Only through retaining our independence will we be able to meet the expectations of modern society.

Douglas Davidson  
Blairgowrie,  
Perthshire

## Not everyone has access to the internet

From Mr J. E. Power,  
MRPharmS

Today I telephoned the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's registration department to dou-

ble check that a locum was on the register. I was surprised to learn that it is no longer possible to obtain such information by telephone [see *PJ*, 23 March, p412]. I was informed that I could get these details off the internet. Although I am in favour of using the internet, not everyone has access to such technology and even fewer from their dispensary. I wonder how small proprietors now check that locums are registered?

Jeremy Power  
Barnsley,  
South Yorkshire

## Not about destroying the Council

From Miss A. M. Lewis,  
FRPharmS

John Ferguson asks: "Why is there a need to destroy the structure [of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's Council] rather than adapting it to meet current requirements?" (*PJ*, 20 July, p101).

The work to modernise the structure of the Council is, in fact, precisely about finding the best way to adapt to the new requirements and has nothing whatsoever to do with destroying the Council. The issues in question are the need to increase the lay representation on the Council — which will continue to have a majority of pharmacists — and

to improve the structure and ways of working so that the Council benefits from a wider range of professional advice from pharmacists.

Mr Ferguson says that he would not want increased lay membership of the Society's Council to be made up of "Government appointees delegated to pursue a specific agenda". From his experience of working with the Council, he well knows that the role of the lay members on the Council is to uphold the public interest. He will also know what an immensely valuable contribution to the business of the Council has been made by the three lay members who, under the 1954 Pharmacy Act, are nominated to the Society's Council by the Privy Council.

The process by which lay members of the Council will be appointed in future has yet to be considered in detail but it will be expected to follow Nolan principles on accountability in public life. It is likely that the process will take account of the guidance of the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, with open advertisement of positions. This was followed for the appointment of the chairman of the Statutory Committee. The aim would not be to seek members as representatives of particular groups but to attract relevant experience, knowledge and skills to strengthen the Council's work.

Ann Lewis  
Secretary and Registrar  
Royal Pharmaceutical Society

## Corporate governance gone mad

From Mr M. Crane,  
MRPharmS

To give members of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's Council an option to sign the voluntary code of conduct and then to penalise Dr Gordon Appelbe and Sultan Dajani for choosing not to sign, by refusing them membership or chairmanship of certain committees, is discriminatory (*PJ*, 29 June, p929).

To state, as the President did, that "only two had not signed and the rest of the Council was not affected" does not lessen the fact that this is discrimination. Dr Appelbe, a former head of the Society's law department, a former secretary of the Statutory Committee, joint author of a standard work on pharmacy law and ethics and a former treasurer of the Society, now appears to be regarded by the Council as untrustworthy.

The voluntary code of conduct appears to resemble a Tudor loyalty oath to which one must subscribe or be punished. Is this corporate governance gone mad, or are we seeing the creation of a Committee of Unpharmaceutical Activities?

Malcolm Crane  
Rye,  
East Sussex

**Timing and submission** *The Pharmaceutical Journal* welcomes submissions about meetings and conferences. Please contact the editorial department before sending in a report, ideally before the meeting takes place, to check that it is not already being covered and to discuss the length of the report.

Photographs are also welcome, provided they are of publishable standard.

Reports should be sent in by e-mail or on disk. If the meeting is newsworthy, the report should be sent in by the Tuesday immediately after it takes place to ensure immediate publication. All reports should be sent within two weeks of the meeting to guarantee publication within a month of the meeting. Reports submitted later than this will not always be published in full in *The Journal*. It may be necessary to publish an abbreviated version in print and post the full report on *PJ Online* ([www.pjonline.com](http://www.pjonline.com)).

**How to prepare a report** Readers need to be encouraged to read reports, so start the report with the most interesting item, not with details of what, where and when the meeting occurred.

Concentrate throughout the report on the most newsworthy contributions to a meeting, such as valuable information that has not already been publicised or strongly worded opinions voiced by influ-

ential speakers. Reports that repeat what readers already know or cover old issues will not be interesting.

Write about what people actually said rather than what they talked about. Ask speakers for copies of their talks or notes. Do not submit reports that are just lists of speakers' topics; they are of no value to the reader. Instead of writing "Professor Plum gave a fascinating account of continuing professional development," readers will want to know exactly what Professor Plum said that was so fascinating.

Do not give every speaker an equal number of words. With the exception of keynote speakers if someone says nothing of interest, then do not report it, however well-known the person. If the keynote speaker says nothing of interest, consider how valuable a meeting report will be.

**Advice for photographers** *The Journal* is unlikely to publish more than two or three photographs from most meetings, so it is best to concentrate on the main speakers. The ideal time to take photographs is at the beginning of each address, while the speaker is still involved in introductions and is likely to be looking out at the audience rather than staring down into his or her notes. Take several shots of each speaker and always aim to be as close as possible to the podium, even if it means obstructing the view of the audience for a short time.