



■ EPREX

Unfair reimbursement

From Mr P. Melnick, MRPharmS

Some months ago Janssen-Cilag recalled certain batches of Eprex prefilled syringes, throughout their range of strengths.

My understanding is that only full packs have been either credited or replaced. I have never met a community pharmacist who bought Eprex other than to fulfil an immediate prescription, but I have met many who had split packs in their refrigerators.

The sums involved are not insubstantial. A single syringe costs £8.38 at the lowest level. And increases by that amount through each strength to a maximum £83.80 each.

The company's attitude appears to be that a split pack will already have been paid for because the contractor can claim for the balance. But the rules are far more complex than that. The balance cannot be claimed if more than one prescription is received in the same month and more than two-thirds of the pack is used. Further, some pharmacists who correctly claim for the balance of a split pack will not be reimbursed when they subsequently dispense prescriptions for the same strength item. They then lose out because the remainder of the recalled batch is not dispensed. Finally, if my understanding of the rules is correct, when there is no further dispensing of that product strength six months after a balance is claimed, the ownership of the split pack effectively reverts from the Department of Health to the contractor.

The point is that irrespective of whether the recalled Eprex belongs to either the contractor or the DoH, the fact is that it manifestly does not belong to the Janssen-Cilag Group of companies or their insurers. I wonder why they have been allowed to treat it as though it does.

Perry Melnick
Ilford, Essex

MIKE BURGESS, senior manager business support, Janssen-Cilag Ltd, replies: Thank you for giving us the opportunity to respond to the above letter. In a batch recall situation our first priority is for patients' safety and therefore the main objective is to ensure that the affected batches are removed from the marketplace as quickly as possible. During the course of any recall it is never the company's intention to financially disadvantage its customers, contractors or the Department of Health. We believe that the majority of the customers who returned stock to us have been fairly recompensed (either because they received replacement or credit from us or because they have been reimbursed for broken bulk). However, we would be happy to have dialogue with those customers who feel that they have an outstanding issue in this respect.

■ THE JOURNAL

A funny smell?

From Mr A. R. White, MRPharmS

Is it just me who has a sensitive nose, or have other members sensed a funny smell coming from the direction of the *PJ* where this year's elections to the Royal

Pharmaceutical Society's Council are concerned?

In the issue of 24 April, there are three items which could turn voters away from the seven candidates who are running in support of the Save Our Society campaign. These are on the first page of the news section (p495), the letters pages (p506) and the first of the Society pages (p519).

I had hoped that the *PJ* of 1 May would, at least, have included a satisfactory explanation as to why the two letters had been published. To be told that they were allowed because "they did not specifically mention names" (*PJ*, 1 May, p543) is unacceptable. What would the decision have been if a letter had referred to "current members of Council" who were seeking re-election?

What happened to the rules for letters which states that "a simultaneous right of reply" may be given to "letters that are critical of individuals or organisations"? The best we are given is a two-line quote, completely divorced from the letters section (*PJ*, 24 April, p495), in which a spokesman said that the SOS and the candidates themselves had agreed not to engage in any activity that might be construed as canvassing.

I am beginning to think that the "dirty tricks department" has a hand in this, either by publishing documents which appear to come from those who oppose it or, perhaps, by exerting undue influence on the editor. As regards the claim by some complainants of "concern about use of personal data", surely they do not believe the Society had made this available.

Did no one appreciate that, in publishing these statements at this time, there was a presumption that the SOS candidates had been tried and effectively found guilty in their absence? Furthermore, was this matter really of such urgency that a statement had to be made immediately? A simple letter to those who had complained about the mailing would have sufficed (for the time being); after all those (like me) who had not received the mailing would not have worried about it.

Alan White
Gravesend, Kent

We accept that the SOS candidates themselves agreed not to canvass for support but it is clear that an anonymous supporter, or supporters, of the SOS group was not prepared to abide by the canvassing rules in the run up to the Council election. The electorate,

many of whom like Mr White did not receive a canvassing mailshot, were entitled to know that the mailshot existed and that the Society had received complaints about it. Members were equally entitled to comment on it in our letters pages if they wished, just as Mr White has done in his letter. To suggest the involvement of a "dirty tricks department" is mischievous, and no influence has been exerted on the editor. — EDITOR.

■ COUNCIL MEETING

Under the flag

From Mr D. Simpson, FRPharmS

Just a small point in relation to Malcolm Goldie's article about the April Council meeting (*PJ*, 17 April, p486). The committee "flag" does not render proceedings taken under it unreportable, contrary to what he suggests. What it does do is temporarily to turn public business into private business. The effect of this is to render any proceedings unreportable directly by any members of the press who are present. But, subject to the approval of the Secretary and Registrar, the affected proceedings may still be covered in the reports of the meeting prepared by *The Journal*, and remarks made by an individual may be reported and attributed to him or her in those published proceedings. If a Council member does not want his or her remarks to appear in print he or she has to ask specifically not to be reported.

Douglas Simpson
Beckenham, Kent
Member of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's Council

Letters to the editor

Letters for publication can be posted, faxed, or sent by e-mail to letters@pharmj.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, including electronic media, 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.

Off the record

Readers are invited to send either 400- or 600-word items about some anecdotal aspect of pharmacy practice that they think is worth sharing. Items are published anonymously but contributors must supply their full name and address. Items should be sent to graeme.smith@pharmj.org.uk for consideration

Broad Spectrum

Contributions of around 1,100 words commenting on topical issues should be sent to graeme.smith@pharmj.org.uk for consideration