

Green light for prescribing training

The first course to train pharmacists to become prescribers was given the green light this week. Clare Bellingham finds out more

THIS WEEK, the first supplementary prescribing training course for pharmacists was given the go-ahead. Based at Keele University, it is the first of a number of expected courses. However, it will be a few months before a clear picture emerges of exactly how many institutions will provide such training. Several are in the process of submitting accreditation documents and more still are at a slightly earlier stage of course development.

Although a final formalisation of the accreditation has yet to take place at the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, the Keele course is effectively accredited.

Robert Dewdney, head of the education division at the Society, explains that a team from the Society visited Keele on Tuesday. "It recommended that accreditation be given with immediate effect," he says. "The recommendation is unequivocal, it could not be stronger, but it has to be formalised by the Society." He adds that the university can proceed with confidence. Formal approval is expected within the next month.

Professor Stephen Chapman, head of the department of medicines management at Keele, comments: "We are delighted that we are now able to proceed with this valuable initiative in the continuing development of the pharmacist's role; we anticipate training 100 pharmacists by the end of 2004 through three courses."

Patricia Black, postgraduate course development manager, University of Keele, says: "This venture has been developed in close collaboration with the Shropshire and Staffordshire Workforce Development Confederation initially for pharmacists in the West Midlands." University preparations for the course are now complete, and applications from West Midlands pharma-

cists are being processed in collaboration with the WDC.

Gul Root, principal pharmaceutical officer, Department of Health, comments: "I am delighted to hear that Keele University is to be the first university to be accredited by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society to provide training for supplementary prescribing by pharmacists.

"This will help to deliver ministers' desire to improve access to medicines for patients, make better use of professional skills and breakdown traditional professional boundaries. It will provide an opportunity for pharmacists to demonstrate their skills and expertise in the effective and safe use of medicines to provide better patient care."

ACCREDITATION VISITS THIS SUMMER

Dr Peter Wilson, consultant to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, says that, so far, 10 institutions have indicated that they would like to start courses in the autumn. Only one other accreditation visit is currently planned but Dr Wilson adds: "I expect to be busy with visits this summer." On top of these, a further 10 colleges have expressed an interest in running a course.

Another university expected to offer prescribing training to pharmacists soon is the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen. Dr Derek Stewart, senior lecturer at the school of pharmacy, confirmed that an accreditation visit is planned for 18 July. "We hope to start the course at the end of July, or as soon as possible," he says.

Dr Stewart explains that because there are two parts to the course — the "taught" part and the "learning and practice" part — that the time taken to complete it is down to the individual. "It is difficult to say when people will choose to start the period of learning and practice, whether it is before, after or during the taught course," he comments.

Robert Gordon University has been commissioned by the Scottish Executive to take 40 pharmacists on the prescribing course and these places have already been allocated.

Meanwhile in London, King's College is in the process of submitting its accreditation documents. Anne Lovejoy, lecturer in pharmacy practice, says: "We hope to be accredited in the summer and the course to begin in September."

Strong links between the school of pharmacy and school of nursing — which already runs a prescribing course — have helped the development of the course. Initially it was expected that there would be 20 places on the new course, but further places might be made available if demand is high.

The University of Leeds also hopes to offer a course in September, and to run two courses a year with the second beginning in

February. Dr Barry Strickland-Hodge, senior lecturer in pharmacy practice, says the course will be open to both pharmacists and nurses, and initially will take 20 students. "We have already had a lot of interest." Many of the interested pharmacists have come from acute trusts with fewer applications from primary care. Most of the interested nurses are based in general practice.

There are two parts to getting a place on a supplementary prescribing course. Beth Taylor, regional principal pharmacist, Community Care Services, London and South East regions, explains that potential students need to apply to the NHS for funding and to the university to be accepted in terms of academic ability.

In terms of NHS funding in London, pharmacists have to complete an application form and demonstrate support from their employer organisation, prescribing team and supervising medical practitioner, she says. Applications are then considered by the local WDC, which allocates funding it was granted by the Department of Health. The applicant has to be in a position to prescribe when they are qualified and meet a need for the NHS.

But the NHS might not be the only source of funding. Speculation exists that the pharmaceutical industry might become involved in funding the cost of locums to allow time away from practice for training.

Ros Meeke, NHS and government affairs manager at Wyeth, says that the company has supported nurses in taking forward prescribing at a local level in a range of ways. It was too early to say whether or not the company might offer similar support to pharmacists. But she adds: "We have been supporting the medicines management pilots and we are interested to see how we can assist at a local level and are also looking at the national level."

This week's news represents a significant step towards pharmacist prescribing.

Curriculum

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society's outline curriculum states that courses in supplementary prescribing should cover the following areas:

- Consultation and decision-making
- Influences on prescribing
- Prescribing in a team context
- Update on therapeutics
- Methods of monitoring
- Evidence-based practice and clinical governance
- Legal, policy, professional and ethical aspects
- Public health context

The duration of courses should be 25 taught days and a period of 12 days "learning in practice".