

Split success: New Zealand's story

Two years ago, the Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand split, creating separate organisations for regulation and representation. With the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain facing calls for a separation of functions, **Clare Bellingham** finds out if the NZ split has been a success

In September 2004, the NZ government legislated against self regulation of health professionals. It perceived self regulation to involve a conflict of interest. The consequences for the Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand were stark. Its dual role of regulation and representation could no longer continue (*PJ*, 16 October 2004, p555-6).

So, from the old PSNZ came two new organisations: the Pharmacy Council, which regulates the country's 4,000 pharmacists, and the new PSNZ, which has both representative and professional roles. (Although the new organisation is called the Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand Incorporated, it is still commonly abbreviated to PSNZ.)

Chris Budgen is president of the PSNZ. He says the split has been a good thing for pharmacy in New Zealand. "The PSNZ has become a stronger voice for pharmacy, unshackled from the regulatory function. It is a body now strongly focused on advocacy and, in a changing primary health care environment, the profession needs it more than ever," he explains.

Cynics might argue that these are the words one might expect from the new organisation's president. But the evidence is unquestionable: 90 per cent of NZ pharmacists have voluntarily become PSNZ members.

New organisation roles

Dividing an organisation presents significant challenges. So, which organisation does what? The Pharmacy Council's roles are to:

- Register pharmacists
- Ensure pharmacists are fit to practise
- Set standards for pharmacy education and competence
- Protect the public

Ensuring pharmacists are fit to practise encompasses a number of functions. These include checking that pharmacists maintain competence, accrediting programmes for ongoing competence and considering the cases of pharmacists unable to perform the required functions. Should disciplinary action be required, the pharmacist is referred to the Health Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal, which acts as a disciplinary body for all health professionals.

The PSNZ's roles are to:

- Provide professional advice and support
- Provide education and training
- Represent the interests of pharmacy to government and other organisations

To be a practising pharmacist in New Zealand, there is a requirement to hold an annual practising certificate. In order to get one, pharmacists have to be enrolled in an accredited recertification (or continuing professional development) programme. This is where the PSNZ has been particularly adroit. One of its flagship schemes is its CPD programme "Enhance". It is currently the only CPD programme accredited by the Pharmacy Council and, as such, participation is in effect compulsory for any pharmacist who wants to remain on the practising register.

Mr Budgen admits the importance of Enhance in securing members of PSNZ. He comments: "The need to sign up for CPD was probably a significant factor but I think there is an expectation now that the society will do more for pharmacists and show more leadership now that it is not the policeman."

In fact, he thinks pharmacists were unaware of how restrictive it is to be a regulator. "It is a funny situation to be in, you want to do what is best for the profession but you have to take the professional high ground even if you would prefer to take a more practical approach," he explains. "The society can do so much more now we are no longer inhibited by the regulatory role."

So what is it that the PSNZ can do now that it could not do before? "Pharmacy in New Zealand is changing, with a move towards pharmacists being paid for professional services rather than labelling bottles," says Mr Budgen. "It is a huge departure from the past so a major theme of the new PSNZ is to encourage and support pharmacists to get moving on new services." He explains that pharmacists are already busy and that this is compounded by a shortage of pharmacists. "Many pharmacists think they haven't got the time to provide new services. My aim, through PSNZ, is to make it as easy as possible." A series of seminars and provision of practical advice are already offered, and possible ideas for the future include a mobile support team to visit pharmacies. "All this is possible because the professional role is the entire focus of the new society," Mr Budgen adds.

Not without problems

But such a massive organisational change has not been without problems. Setting up the Pharmacy Council was resourced from the assets of the old PSNZ, which put a financial strain on the new PSNZ in its first year. This meant a cultural change for PSNZ staff and pharmacists alike. "Some pharmacists had expectations of generosity in terms of things like expenses from the society, which we had to tighten up on," he explains.

Not without problems

One thing the PSNZ was keen to ensure was that costs were not passed on to pharma-

But what about Britain?

Since publication of the Foster review, pharmacists have been debating whether or not the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain should split into two bodies: one for regulation and one for representation. Fear of the unknown is a barrier to such a division, with even those in favour of change wary of unforeseen consequences. So there is much to learn from recent events in New Zealand.

Since the split of the Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand has clearly been a success, it is perhaps surprising that Chris Budgen, president of the PSNZ, has reservations about a similar division of the Society in Britain. "My concern is securing the financial future. The Society already offers a lot of professional resources and these would have to be slimmed down if its financial position was put in jeopardy," he says.

If the Society were to lose its regulatory role and thus depend on its membership numbers for income then this could threaten financial security. But if the Society could achieve financial independence through another means, for example through its publications, then it could confidently continue to provide professional services. "The Society currently needs the security of its regulatory role, particularly because the National Pharmacy Association is so strong. But if, and only if, the Society could achieve a guaranteed income then a split would be good thing for pharmacy," Mr Budgen concludes.

cists in fees. Before the split, the 2004 PSNZ retention fee was NZ\$695 (about £260) plus tax. This year, pharmacists paid NZ\$365 (inclusive of tax) to the Pharmacy Council and NZ\$340 (inclusive of tax) to the PSNZ.

Another change for the PSNZ is the need to compete for members. "We simply have to meet members' needs otherwise they will vote with their feet," comments Mr Budgen. That is probably why some tension exists between the PSNZ and the Pharmacy Guild, the organisation that represents the interests of community pharmacy.

Although the two bodies now meet regularly through the establishment of a pharmacy co-ordinating committee, Mr Budgen says that there is an overlap of interests which results in competition for membership. "There is strong feeling within the profession that there should be one representative body formed from the guild and the society. Extensive work on a merger took place in the past but it was put on hold, although the subject is still live at the pharmacy co-ordinating committee meetings."