

Make your views known to Darzi review

Chief pharmaceutical officer for England Keith Ridge believes that the two pharmacy engagement events he is hosting in London and Manchester are an important opportunity for pharmacists to express their views about Lord Darzi's review of the NHS in England. **Matthew Wright** reports

Lord Darzi's Next Stage Review of the NHS for England could bring about a wave of change affecting the way the NHS operates — to which pharmacy would not be immune.

Keith Ridge, chief pharmaceutical officer at the Department of Health, believes that pharmacy has an important future role to play in delivering a fairer, safer, effective and more personal service for people. "It's therefore important to be at the forefront of the discussion process," he declares.

Lord Darzi has asked Dr Ridge to canvass the opinions of pharmacists at a couple of events — one to be held at the Royal Pharmaceutical Society headquarters in London (27 February) and another in Manchester (5 March).

"I really hope that individual pharmacists will take the opportunity to get involved," Dr Ridge says, "not just at national events like those in London and Manchester, but also at a more local or regional level. And don't always wait to be asked!"

Andy Murdock, pharmacy director at Lloydspharmacy, sits on the advisory board that is helping Lord Darzi conduct the review. "What we will see from this review is how primary and community care is to be practised going forward," says Mr Murdock. "Consequently this process needs the input from a range of healthcare professionals to ensure best processes, best systems and ultimately best patient care is delivered. Naturally pharmacy has its role to play here with its extensive network and skill sets."

Dr Ridge says: "I'm very pleased that Andy Murdock, supported by a reference group made up of people from across pharmacy practice, is representing pharmacy on the advisory board."

He goes on: "The NHS has come a long way over the past 60 years, and in my view, wouldn't have been able to achieve as much without the dedication, commitment and innovation associated with the pharmacy profession. Pharmacists have a unique knowledge and set of skills which must be fed into any discussions about making the NHS better and safer for the public and patients."

Engagement

But how good are pharmacists at making their voices heard? Mr Murdock says that, although many pharmacists are aware of the re-

view, he is not sure how many appreciate the impact its outcomes may have on the expected pharmacy White Paper.

Dr Ridge reflects: "It's never easy to ensure busy front-line practitioners are fully aware of important strategic initiatives like these. However, the outcome of the review will impact on everyone working in the NHS as well those who utilise it. My understanding is that there is a high level of awareness of the review in general terms, particularly with the recent high profile media coverage. We envisage greater awareness as one of the benefits of having the engagement events."

He adds: "Ministers are quite clear they want to see pharmacy engaged in the review and the events will provide an opportunity to contribute to it. As themes emerge from the work of the review, these will inform and influence the development of the forthcoming White Paper on pharmacy in England."

Michael Beaman, pharmaceutical adviser for the Society's practice division, believes that pharmacists have been overwhelmed by many recent consultations, such as those on the future professional body, Society fees and the responsible pharmacist, and may not know very much about the Darzi review.

Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee head of NHS services Alastair Buxton concurs: "It is not easy to find time to respond to reviews such as this, but the views of grass roots pharmacists who are working day in, day out with their patients will have very useful practical insights into how the NHS could be developed to provide better services for patients. It is important that these ideas are shared."

Mr Beaman suggests that there should be more events of this kind, either regionally or locally.

Expectation

So what kind of issues should pharmacists be prepared to discuss?

According to Dr Ridge, Lord Darzi's interim report, published in October, included a commitment to identify how pharmacies can best support seamless urgent care. "We know there are concerns about prompt and easy access to medicines, including urgent repeat orders. Alongside this, the other two key areas these events will focus on — and ensure

we get robust feedback — are supporting people with long-term conditions and staying healthy."

Mr Murdock says individual pharmacists ought to be thinking about:

- What direction they want to see the professional travelling in
- How they see pharmacy practice in the future and, consequently, how skills may have to change
- Pharmacy's role in delivering integrated care and how the greater pharmacy family can be used to better effect
- How pharmacy can become better engaged in commissioning
- What they consider to be barriers for pharmacy

Mr Buxton believes: "A good result [from the review] would be the development of a genuinely level playing field for NHS primary care service provision, so community pharmacy could compete to provide services to patients based on quality, convenience and accessibility. At the moment practice-based commissioning is not delivering such an environment, but it is imperative that it is developed if the goal of shifting care out of hospitals is to occur."

Fin McCaul, Independent Pharmacy Federation chairman, hopes that the review will recognise the value that the commercial environment in which pharmacy operates offers the NHS. "The Darzi review is very much about bringing support and effective care out to the patients, so this is very important. Pharmacy is great at dealing with patients and is a very personable service. We also have great opportunities to deal with and manage long term care."

The National Pharmacy Association is keen for Lord Darzi to better integrate pharmacy into urgent care systems. Stephen Fishwick, NPA head of external relations, elaborates: "Community pharmacies already play an important role in the provision of urgent care and with the right environment that role could increase greatly." He suggests that national schemes for minor ailments and for emergency supply of regularly prescribed medicines would be consistent with Lord Darzi's vision.

"We hope pharmacists will convey their day-to-day experiences of the challenge of providing services within the NHS," Mr Fishwick adds, "but also bring good-news stories to the table — it's paramount that Darzi sees pharmacy as part of the solution, not as a problem. It is also important to present a case for community pharmacy as part of a multidisciplinary, multi-provider effort, with seamless patient care as the goal."



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