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Pharmacists' views on the Council structure of the future

"What will the Council look like in the future?" was the title of a survey distributed with The Journal on 29 June. This week we analyse the first half of the survey; the analysis of the second half will be published at the beginning of September

Regular readers of the Letters pages of *The Journal* might expect that few pharmacists would accept that modernising the Council of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society would mean that more lay members will join it. However, results from the survey distributed with *The Journal* of 29 June tell a different story.

In total 1,760 completed surveys were returned. In answer to the question: "The Council should change its composition to fulfil the requirements for a modern regulator", 25 per cent strongly agreed, 52.5 per cent agreed and 21.5 per cent either disagreed or strongly disagreed. In other words, over 75 per cent of the profession believe that changes to the composition of the Council must be made.

Further analysis revealed that those pharmacists in agreement encompassed both those who believed that changing the composition of the Council means that the pharmacy element should increase to 100 per cent, as well as those who accept that there should be a larger lay input to the Council. A breakdown of those agreeing that the composition should change revealed that 931 respondents (53 per cent) accepted that more lay members will join the Council and 443 (25 per cent) did not (Figure 1).

A close look at the proportion of lay members that respondents would find acceptable is also revealing (Figure 2). A total of 136 pharmacists (8 per cent) accept the pharmacy element could be 54 per cent or less, and a further 616 (35 per cent) accept the pharmacy element could be no more than 60 per cent. As the pharmacy element increases 158 (9 per cent) would accept a pharmacy element of 70 or 75 per cent; and 267 (15 per cent) would like to see a pharmacy element of between 80 and 95 per cent (roughly reflecting the way the Council is constituted at the moment).

A total of 493 respondents would like the Council to be only made up of pharmacists (28 per cent) — broadly reflecting the proposal put forward by the Young Pharmacists Group. Typical responses in favour of the YPG proposal were: "Regulatory machinery should be set up within the Society — it should have a separate board with almost

half lay membership." And: "I strongly believe the Society should maintain its 'membership' role and should administer on behalf of the Government a reformed regulatory body, as indeed it does at the moment." Another respondent said: "Devolve regulatory function to a new committee as described by the Young Pharmacists Group." Yet another said: "I agree with the Young Pharmacists Group's proposal, ie, changing the structure of the Society rather than the Council." Another said: "One organisation cannot be expected to act in the members' best interests and to police those members unless a specific subdivision of responsibilities is made." And from one retired respondent: "Allow the Young Pharmacists Group to run the Society; it is their future."

This group of pharmacists also tended to be more disillusioned with the Society and Council in general: "The Council of the Society should not be concerned with commercial matters. The present arrangements mean that the Society's focus is on retail pharmacy issues to far too great an extent. Pharmacy is a broad-based profession and the aim should be to broaden its base and gain strength intellectually through diversity." And another pharmacist said: "Nothing I can write here, any of the answers I've given, no letters I could write, no opinions I give any way at all will make one jot of difference to what the Society does." "If Government requires a regulatory body let them set it up at a minimal cost to the membership. I am quite happy with external regulation if it is necessary but the [Modernisation

Steering Group] seems to have made up its mind already. If we go down the route they have decided, then the Society is of no practical use to the membership."

What about the views of pharmacists who either accept the status quo or accept greater lay input? At the moment, there are

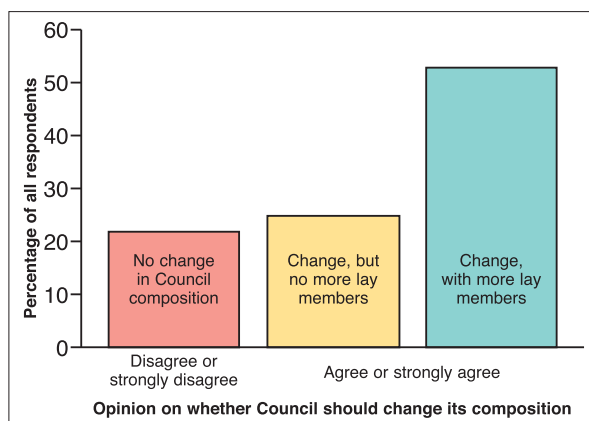


Figure 1: Respondents' views on whether the Council composition should change to fulfil requirements for a modern regulatory body

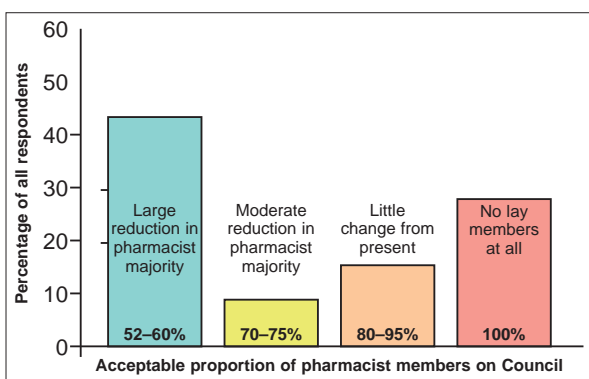


Figure 2: Respondents' views on what should be the proportion of pharmacist members on the Council



Response to questions in the first half of the survey

Set out below is a summary of the response to the first half of the questionnaire survey (relating to the Modernisation Steering Group's first paper).

The current Council structure is sustainable for a modern regulator and professional body

Strongly agree	130	7.5%
Agree	545	31%
Disagree	833	47.5%
Strongly disagree	221	12.5%

The Council should change its composition to fulfil the requirements for a modern regulatory body

Strongly agree	438	25%
Agree	925	52.5%
Disagree	268	15%
Strongly disagree	114	6.5%

If you agree, do you accept that changing its composition will mean that more lay members will join the Council?

Yes	931	53%
No	443	25%
Unanswered	386	22%

What should be the proportion of pharmacist members on the Council?

52%	75	4.5%
54%	61	3.5%
60%	616	35%
70%	19	1%
75%	139	8%
80%	180	10.5%
85%	31	2%
90%	48	2.5%
95%	8	0.5%
100%	493	28%

What should be the total number of members of Council?

Under 20	536	30.5%
20-30	1077	61%
Over 30	71	4%

The Council's constitution should allow for the inclusion of pharmacy technicians within its non-pharmacist membership?

Strongly agree	284	16%
Agree	688	39%
Disagree	423	24%
Strongly disagree	347	20%

Should the chief pharmaceutical officers of the Department of Health, the Government's Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales be invited to attend Council meetings?

Yes, as observers	335	19%
Yes, to debate but not vote	1,007	57%
Yes, as full voting members	216	12.5%
No	176	10%

Respondent's field of practice

Community	971	55%
Hospital	270	15.5%
Primary care	105	6%
Academia	55	3%
Industry	108	6%
Other	279	16%

Respondent's age

Under 25	23	1.5%
25-34	200	11.5%
35-44	351	20%
45-54	386	22%
55-64	332	19%
65 and over	431	24.5%

How the percentages were calculated This survey reflects a snapshot of the views of pharmacists. It has not been analysed rigorously. All percentages are based on the total sample of 1,760 and rounded to the nearest 0.5 per cent. Not all respondents answered all questions, and a few respondents gave unexpected answers. For example, a few said they accepted that more lay members

will join the Council and then said the Council should be made up of pharmacists alone (100 per cent). In the field of practice section the "Other" category embraced health authority personnel, consultants as well as retired pharmacists who did not specify a sector where they had worked. Other retired respondents were allocated to their former sector when it was specified.

three lay members on the Council giving a pharmacy element of 87.5 per cent. Doubling that to six lay members would reduce the pharmacy element to 75 per cent. Looking at Figure 2, the Society's Modernisation Steering Group should be able to take some comfort from the fact that a total of 53 per cent of respondents would accept at least a doubling of the lay input on the Council.

In addition, 43 per cent of pharmacists would accept the proportions of professional and lay members seen in other regulatory bodies (60 per cent professional representation or less). A typical response in favour of 60 per cent of pharmacists is: "The system should allow for the best people to come through, but also have professionals to help with the running of Council." Another said: "It should be emphasised that it is essential to retain the unique regulatory/professional role of the Council in order to present the levels of transparency, accountability and governance standards that are seen to be in the public interest." A different view was: "The Council needs to radically change its vision to become more proactive, and have Council members who reflect and understand the 'new NHS' and can help pharmacists from all sections to deliver on that agenda." Another respondent said: "The future of the profession depends on the credibility and hence on the quality of the Council. Neither Council nor the Soci-

ety will have credibility unless lay representation approaches 50 per cent and pharmacist members are clearly and consistently seen to act in the public interest — anything less will be seen as a fudge."

On a slightly different tack, a further respondent said: "If the Council continues to be predominantly made up of pharmacist businessmen/women, the profession will

fewer (71; 4.0 per cent) wanted to see the Council increase to over 30 members.

In response to the statement: "The Council's constitution should allow for the inclusion of pharmacy technicians within its non-pharmacists membership", respondents were in favour. Nearly 1,000 respondents (972; 56 per cent) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement and 770 (44 per cent) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

An overwhelming majority of respondents would welcome the chief pharmaceutical officers of the Department of Health, the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales at Council meetings: 335 (19 per cent) would wish them to be there as observers; 1,007 (57 per cent) would be happy for them to debate, provided they did not vote; 216 (12.5 per cent) would accept them as full voting members; and only 176 (10 per cent) did not want them to be there at all (Figure 3).

A more radical proposal came from one respondent: "We should be looking to an EU [European Union] Pharmaceutical Council — then perhaps pharmacists would enjoy the status their colleagues in Europe seem to have."

The vast majority of respondents worked in the community (55 per cent); 15.5 per cent came from the hospital sector and 6 per cent worked in primary care, with 3 per cent from academia, 6 per cent in industry and a further 16 per cent specifying "Other".

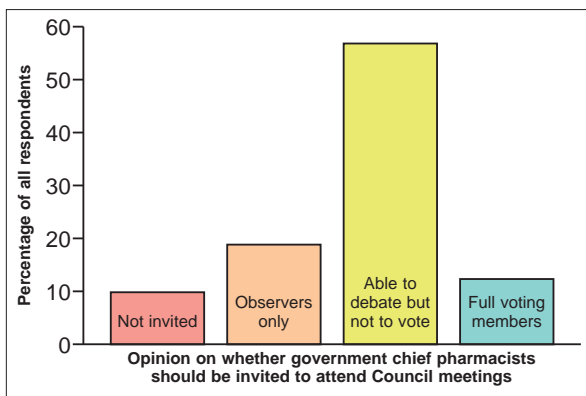


Figure 3: Respondents' views on whether the chief pharmacists for England, Scotland and Wales should have a role on the Council

continue to be seen as a profession run by shopkeepers, rather than as a true health care profession."

Over 1,000 respondents (1,077; 61 per cent) accept that the Council should have between 20 and 30 members (as at the moment). However, 536 pharmacists (30.5 per cent) would like to see a much smaller Council at work (under 20) although far