

# When will the Society finally sort out CPD for overseas pharmacists?

By Sara Barrow, formerly of the Royal Hampshire County Hospital, now living in Montesano, Washington, US

In 2002 Peter Wilson, then the specialist adviser to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society on continuing professional development, told us that "mandatory CPD would apply to all pharmacists except those who are retired and those who live and work abroad" (*PJ*, 5 October 2002, p508). The following year we learnt that the CPD implementation committee thought that exactly the same requirements for CPD should apply to "all pharmacists throughout the world" (*PJ*, 17 May 2003, p699), although presumably the committee meant all pharmacists registered with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain.

With hindsight, these notes from a special Council meeting, which include Council members' views on the costs of CPD for overseas pharmacists, make interesting reading and will certainly influence the way I vote in future Council elections. Overseas pharmacists requesting further information about CPD seem to have received little advice (*PJ*, 17 May 2003, p680, and 13 September 2003, p321) except that the Society will communicate with its overseas members before CPD becomes mandatory for everyone (*PJ*, 14 February 2004, p288).

The information on the CPD website did not, and still does not, include any details about how CPD will be extended to overseas pharmacists ([www.uptodate.org.uk](http://www.uptodate.org.uk); accessed 21 December 2004 and 12 January 2005), although there was plenty of information about the UK roll-out and the support available. Indeed, at the October 2004 Council meeting, it had not been decided whether the CPD materials issued by the Society would be sent to all overseas members, sent only on request, or should only be made available through the website (*PJ*, 16 October 2004, p581). We now know, however, that a CPD pack, including paper copies of the CPD materials, will be sent to practising overseas pharmacists in February 2005. Presumably those who have declared that they are not currently practising but who wish to return to practice at a later date will also be able to request a copy of this pack.

A former Council member believes that "CPD identification, monitoring and support is the same for everyone, part-time or full-time, overseas or based in Britain" (*PJ*, 16

October 2004, p559) but, fortunately, at least one current Council member realises that this is clearly not the case (*PJ*, 9 October 2004, p516, 30 October 2004, p642). For one thing, we have no local branch of the Society and

## There are other British pharmacists in the US but how do I find out who they are and where they are so that we can discuss CPD?

we cannot attend local meetings or discuss CPD with a local facilitator. A look at the Diary column in *The Pharmaceutical Journal* for 13 November 2004 (p730) shows that CPD was the topic at 15 per cent of the local branch meetings listed. We cannot attend the training sessions organised by the Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education, we cannot request the CPPE distance-learning packs, and their e-learning system currently offers only a limited range of topics ([www.cppe.man.ac.uk](http://www.cppe.man.ac.uk); accessed 12

January 2005). We are also unable to borrow items from the Society's library. There are other British pharmacists in the US but how do I find out who they are and where they are so that we can discuss CPD?

There are technical problems with undertaking, recording and submitting CPD from overseas. It has already been mentioned that some overseas pharmacists do not have access to electricity, let alone computers or the internet (*PJ*, 30 October 2004, p644). This will mean that they also cannot use the CPD desktop facility for recording CPD off-line, or photocopy the CPD forms provided by the Society. I do not know whether the CPD pack sent to overseas pharmacists will include the video "Your next move" but, if so, I expect it will be in PAL format, which will not play on a television that uses NTSC format.

Pharmacists in the US also have the problem of paper sizes when printing documents from the internet; the standard paper size is "letter" which is slightly shorter than A4, consequently we have to change the paper size on our printer settings, and any documents, tables or diagrams which covered a full page of A4 will not be as easy to follow when they are either split over two pages or the bottom line is missing. Articles saved from journals will not fit in the folders and ring-binders available here, making it difficult to organise documents.

It also seems that we cannot participate in the Life-long Learning scheme published in *Hospital Pharmacist*, although this is described

as being open to all pharmacists (*Hospital Pharmacist*, November 2004, p437). There are two reasons for this, and the first is timing. It was the second week in December when I received the November issue, and entries had to be returned by 29 December. Air mail between the US and the UK seems to take about a week so, allowing a couple of extra days just to be on the safe side and a couple of extra days for Christmas, I would have had to send my answers no later than 18 December. That does not leave much time for proper study of the articles published, let alone any additional reading. The second reason is that a stamped, addressed envelope must also be sent; even if I knew what the postage would cost for whatever is being returned to me, my local post office does not sell the right stamps. I could mail my answers to someone in the UK and ask them to add the appropriate stamps and then send everything on to *Hospital Pharmacist* for me, but that adds an extra three or four days to the timescale, and I am back to square one.

Much has been said already about the increase in the Society's retention fee for members, particularly those, such as overseas pharmacists, who were previously paying a reduced fee. Overseas pharmacists who remain on the Register as practising pharmacists face an increase of 156 per cent, so it would seem that those members of the Society's Council who suggested that overseas pharmacists should face additional charges have got their way, although I would certainly like to know why "processing overseas pharmacists' returns would be much more expensive" (*PJ*, 17 May 2003, p699) than processing other CPD returns.

The information on the 2005 retention form includes those working overseas in the definition of a practising pharmacist, although the separate guidance document published on the Society's website ([www.rpsgb.org](http://www.rpsgb.org); accessed 12 January 2005) does not mention overseas pharmacists at all. I was particularly interested to note the information available in the "Register search" section with regard to eligibility to practise; it states that the indication of practising (P) or non-practising (NP) refers to the pharmacist's eligibility to practise in Great Britain. This implies that pharmacists who work outside Great Britain can remain as non-practising members of the Society, continue to pay a reduced fee, and only undertake CPD or continuing education in the manner required by the country in which they practise. When will the Society finally sort out our CPD?