

# insight



The magazine of the **Pharmacists' Defence Association**

# Five wasted years?

**RP review supports  
PDA position –  
regulations now  
set to change**

See page 12

**Also inside**  
**Decriminalisation  
of dispensing errors**

See page 5





## Chairman's Letter

**At last – a major breakthrough for the RP campaign!**

**Surely we have not wasted 5 years.**

**As many PDA members will recall, the last five years have seen the PDA involved in some gruelling campaigning as we sought to protect pharmacists and patients from the RP regulations and the associated prospect of remote supervision.**

**The PDA was supported by many members, whether through attending conferences, signing petitions or even voting for the RPSGB election candidates who pledged to stop remote supervision.**

Finally, the government agreed to a review and an independent survey has been done. The findings (pages 12 -14) largely support what the PDA has been saying for some years – the RP regulations are just not delivering what they were intended to.

We are delighted that the PDA's arguments have finally been vindicated, the concerns can no longer be marginalised and we thank PDA members for their support. This means that we can now effect some changes and it is probable that the consultation on remote supervision is unlikely to occur in the short term.

Since the announcement, many members have already expressed the view that these have been five wasted years for the profession, where energies have been sapped, let alone the anguish that many of them have endured. This would be entirely right if it was not for one important factor. As the feature on pages 12 to 14 will show, many important 'real time' lessons are now available to the policy makers in pharmacy, the five years will only have been wasted if they chose not to heed these when contemplating what to do next.

We are determined to see that the present opportunity will be used to maximum effect. Rather than tinker with the regulations we should instead hold a serious and mature debate involving all stakeholders; employee's, locums, employers, pharmacy organisations, other healthcare partners, patients and ultimately the government about how exactly we want to develop our profession.

We believe that what went wrong with the previous consultation about the 'new supervision' regime was that it was held ahead of such a debate and ahead of any agreement around new models of practice. In effect the policy on supervision was being crafted without a central vision; we now have an opportunity to rectify that – so let's use it.

### It's time to unite behind a common vision

Increasingly, the practice of pharmacy in the differing devolved countries of the UK is beginning to diverge. Nevertheless, there is one theme that is common to all the devolved administrations and that is the need to find financial savings as a consequence of the dire economic crisis.

In England, the government has announced that it needs to find £21 billion of savings within the NHS in the next four to five years and has already commenced some very controversial reorganisation. In Wales, the government has sought to assess the value of the current pharmacy contribution to healthcare and in Scotland the government has announced a comprehensive review of pharmacy service delivery (see News Page 6).

We believe that against this uncertain background it is important to take a proactive approach – be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. Undoubtedly, there is now an excellent opportunity to propose radical solutions that hitherto may not have been seriously considered. For the last year, the PDA has been working on the development of a strategic plan that we have called the 'Road Map' which we believe would allow the health service to deliver more for less, with improved outcomes for patients and which would produce new and improved roles for pharmacists. We describe the thrust of these proposals on pages 10 and 11. In developing them, we have involved stakeholders from all areas of pharmacy practice, professionals from a range of health care disciplines such as GPs, practice nurses and specialist health service providers and patients.

We are aware that several models of practice are now beginning to emerge within pharmacy and we do not profess to hold the monopoly on ideas. However, the PDA's Road Map initiative is intended to be our contribution to what will hopefully become the forthcoming big debate about our professional future.

We expect that this will represent the main programme of our work throughout 2012 and we look forward to taking on board the valuable views and contributions of our members.

**We wish you a Happy New Year!**

Mark Kozioł  
Chairman, The PDA

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## Big shake-up for PDA Conference 2012

Since 2004 the PDA has always held its annual conference at the end of February in Birmingham. In recent years, the conference has become increasingly elaborate with conference strands for certain sectors of pharmacy, pre-reg's and even pharmacy students.

Last year, with more than 500 delegates attending, the conference was the largest PDA event yet.

From feedback that we received from delegates and also from those members who did not attend we have decided to change the format. The main issue is that with delegates required to travel to Birmingham and return home in a day, this puts the PDA Conference out of reach for many members in other parts of the country.

Responding to member feedback and recognising that the practice of pharmacy is beginning to diverge within the different devolved administrations, in 2012 the PDA Conference format will radically change.

Instead of one conference, the PDA will be holding at least four separate events; one in Scotland, two in England and one in Wales. Furthermore, as the two current Pre-reg conferences are usually oversubscribed we will also be providing at least two more events for pre-reg's to attend.

### Two conference themes will be developed in 2012

#### Are we over producing pharmacists?

The number of Schools of Pharmacy in England has dramatically increased and already there are 40% more pharmacy students in the current undergraduate programme. This means that in the next few years a much larger number of pharmacists will be qualifying.

The objective of this PDA Conference will be to:

- Understand more about the demographics of the pharmacy profession.
- Consider the potential impact of such large increases in the number of pharmacists.
- Consider mechanisms that can manage the increase so that it can be beneficial and not damaging to the profession.
- Develop any necessary policy to support PDA members going forward.

Birmingham April 22nd  
London May 20th  
Cardiff June 24th

#### Re-engineering the delivery of pharmacy services

The Scottish Government has announced a formal review of the services provided by pharmacists. This provides an excellent opportunity for the hopes and ambitions of Scottish Pharmacists to be strongly articulated and fed into the review process.

This conference will provide an excellent opportunity for individual pharmacists to share their views and also to consider some of the proposals already being developed by the PDA following focus group work with pharmacists in Scotland.

Glasgow March 18th



Final details of all these events will be published on the PDA website and emailed to members nearer the date.

## Student Fitness to Practise

The PDA has a fast growing membership category of pharmacy students who recognise the value of belonging to an organisation set up to defend the individual; better still membership of the PDA is free to pharmacy undergraduates. Student FtP procedures are now becoming established in Schools of Pharmacy and the number of cases involving students is rising. Situations which students may consider trivial can easily escalate into serious allegations being made against them. Facebook comments, helping a friend with their studies or just being in the company of drug using friends are all examples where students have been exposed to complaints that may affect their ability to register as a pharmacist.

As well as providing reactive advice, the PDA is working with a number of Schools of Pharmacy to introduce case studies and raise awareness amongst students through input into the curriculum. The benefits of PDA membership to students also include professional indemnity insurance for pharmacy work undertaken whilst a student and risk management information and advice. PDA student members are entitled to request representation when faced with a FtP enquiry or even an employment dispute. Mark Pitt, the membership services manager of the PDA urges students to take advantage of free PDA membership as soon as possible. "We are sometimes contacted by students in difficulties who are not yet members of the PDA. Unfortunately they are not eligible for the extensive level of support we provide to existing student members" "To get the same level of expert support outside the PDA can cost thousands of pounds and the message is simple – join the PDA for free now and be covered for problems that arise whilst a member" says Mark.

If you are a pharmacy student or know someone who is, visit [www.the-pda.org](http://www.the-pda.org) for details on how to join us.



## All Change on the PDA Union Executive

In recent Union by-elections three new National Executive members were elected unopposed. Manish Patel, David Tyas and Harminder Lall assume their posts as Treasurer, Assistant General Secretary Administration and Membership and Communications Officer respectively.

John Murphy the General Secretary welcomed their appointment and was also quick to thank the officers who had stepped down for their dedicated work in the past. "I am pleased that the Executive is now up to its full complement and can assure the new members that there is plenty for us all to do to continue to make strides as a still relatively young union", said John. "I would also like to thank all those that put themselves up for election for the Membership Groups; they certainly have a big job to do in ensuring that they feed their constituency's ideas, thoughts and feelings to the executive so as we can represent them to good effect". The results of the by-elections can be found on the union web site [www.pda-union.org](http://www.pda-union.org).

## The decriminalisation of dispensing errors

Many PDA members will remember pharmacist Elizabeth Lee who was given a suspended jail sentence in 2009 for making a dispensing error. Even though the legal appeal crafted by PDA succeeded in overturning her original conviction under section 85.5 of the Medicines Act (wrong labelling) in the Royal Court of Appeal, the Crown Prosecution Service substituted that failed prosecution with a fresh one under Section 64.1 (wrong product supplied) albeit the original prison sentence was replaced with a fine. Since then, Section 64.1 has never been challenged in law.

Following that episode, the government committed to decriminalising inadvertent dispensing errors and this was to be done during an MHRA review of the Medicines Act. However, towards the end of 2011, the MHRA announced that for technical reasons they would now not be able to deliver the requisite changes.

Shortly thereafter, representatives of the various pharmacy bodies, to include the RPS, CCA, NPA, AIMPS, IPF and the PDA joined forces to agree the best way forward.

The RPS had discussed an amendment to the Health and Social Care Bill that was currently going through Parliament with Lord Clement Jones which revolved around a concept called due diligence defence for pharmacists. However, whilst the RPS was obviously trying its best to solve the problem; due diligence would not have resulted in de-criminalisation for pharmacists. Consequently, what was agreed was that the discussion of this amendment in parliament was to be used simply as an opportunity to try and commit the government to taking the necessary steps that the MHRA in their review had failed to deliver.

It was necessary to brief numerous Lords and other parliamentarians to ensure that the debate in Parliament was to be as helpful to pharmacy's cause as possible and this was a task that was delivered more effectively through collective action. It was also necessary to send a formal communication to the Department of Health and then to brief officials, indicating exactly what it was that we hoped would be achieved.

### The thrust of the briefing note to the Department was as follows:

The pharmacy profession calls for the removal of all risks of prosecution following a genuine dispensing error, in line with the statements previously expressed by the Pharmacy Minister, Earl Howe.

The notion that a genuine mistake which causes a dispensing error to occur can lead to the criminal prosecution of a healthcare practitioner acting in good faith is damaging to both the public and the professional interest.

The aim of amendment 337a is that dispensing errors committed by registered healthcare professionals that have not occurred through gross negligence, recklessness or wilful harm should not face the prospect of criminal prosecution, but should instead be dealt with by the relevant healthcare professional regulator.

We are seeking a change to the law that would remove the strict liability basis of the offences for supply in the Medicines Act and be replaced by criminal intent, gross negligence or recklessness. We believe that genuine errors in dispensing should not be criminalised and that it should remain within the remit of the General Pharmaceutical Council to hold professionals to account where no criminal prosecution takes place.

We believe that this must be a priority for primary legislation and we seek a commitment from the Department of Health to bring forward an amendment to the Health and Social Care Bill at report stage in the House of Lords. We will work with the Department to ensure that proposals seeking to achieve our aims have the support of the pharmacy sector.

This was co-signed by all of the pharmacy organisations to show the extent of the consensus within the profession.



## Facebook; post online at your peril and face dismissal

It has been reported that two thirds of people use networking or blogging sites, and it's easy to see how it can become a way of letting off steam about work.

The PDA warns members of the risks of facing employers, the regulator and possibly the law, if boundaries are overstepped.

In Greece v Wetherspoons Plc the Employment Tribunal held that a Manager of a pub was fairly dismissed, having posted derogatory comments about customers on her Facebook page. The employers alleged that she had thereby undermined the Company's reputation with the public at large.

The Manager argued – without success – that her rights to freedom of expression/privacy ought to have prevailed but the ET were not persuaded.

In one recent case, a pre-registration student was dismissed from a multiple, after having been found guilty of gross misconduct. The student had used Facebook as an outlet for his daily experiences and had written derogatory comments about his colleagues. Neither the Company nor his colleagues were named specifically, but the view was taken that the link could easily be made.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case and there have been a number of pharmacy cases resulting in dismissal, where either comments or photographs have been posted on-line.

What can you do? Exercise caution, assume all information you put onto the World Wide Web, is accessible and could potentially be used as evidence against you, and check you are familiar with e-mail, internet and intranet policies.

*Think twice, before you tweet!*

## Employee's should expect appropriate support from their employers

Mr Nuttall the Chief Executive of the Co-Op Pharmacy recently gave his opinion to the Chemists and Druggist magazine about a GPhC fitness to practice determination in which a PDA member and former manager of one of his pharmacies was given a warning for "sexual harassment" of staff.

In the news report he expressed "disappointment" at the outcome and was quoted as saying to the press "We believe that the circumstances of this case warranted stronger sanctions including a requirement to actively demonstrate a change in behaviour following completion of the equality training programme."

Although our member admitted that he had used some of the behaviours he was accused of, it was accepted that he did not mean to distress his colleagues and as the manager and professional pharmacist that he should have set an example. There was no doubt from the evidence that there was a culture of 'inappropriate banter' amongst certain staff which our member found himself engaging in "It may be that, for some reason," said the Chairman of the professional disciplinary hearing, "[the registrant] felt that he had to participate in this culture". What may have escaped Mr Nuttall's notice however when he spoke to the press, were the testimonials that our member received after he had left the Co-operative's employment. One of many glowing statements made by a manager of a competitor pharmacy organisation and highlighted by the Chairman in his summing up stated;

"The allegations made against him do not sound like the same gentleman that I have met and worked with. I have not seen or received any reports that would cause me any concern, and would have no qualms about employing him to work in our pharmacy."

The Chairman of the panel also concluded "We believe that there was lack of training and support in management skills for [the registrant] at the pharmacy where all of this happened." John Murphy, the PDA Union General Secretary who was at the hearing said "We could never condone any member sexually harassing staff but many young inexperienced managers will relate to what has happened to this member and will understand how it might have happened; I know its a lesson well learned by [our member]. However, in saying what he did to the press Mr Nuttall would appear to be distancing himself from the fact that he and his organisation has somewhat failed in its duty of care to provide the appropriate training and support necessary for inexperienced managers who are thrown in at the deep end".

In a further professional disciplinary episode involving an ex - employee of Co-Op pharmacy who had been involved in the falsification of MUR records, the Investing Committee in determining that a warning should be given to the pharmacist also took the unusual step of asking the GPhC secretariat to write to Co-Op pharmacy to request that it reviews its practices to ensure that pharmacists do not feel under such intense pressure to complete MURs.

The PDA Union believes that employees should have the right to expect a working environment, which is free from intense pressure to complete MUR's and for their employer to provide support structures which will help them to perform their role to an acceptable standard. This includes management skills training if it is integral to the job and if it leaves the pharmacist vulnerable without them as it did in this case. Where this support and training is lacking then the union is of the belief that the employer should have a case to answer.



### Role of pharmacists in Scotland to be reviewed

The role of community pharmacists in Scotland is to be reviewed. It will consider how to make better use of pharmacists expertise and enhance their involvement in primary healthcare.

The review aims to encourage closer working with GPs and other community based services and will examine the fitness for purpose and long term sustainability of the current arrangements for providing NHS pharmaceutical services. It will evaluate group pharmacy practice and specialisation and consider areas such as personalised patient care for the management of long term conditions and minor ailments. Evidence will be taken on making the best possible use of resources, particularly in relation to pharmacists' contribution to the safe and optimal use of medicines.

Mark Koziol, PDA Chairman, comments: "We are absolutely delighted that this review is taking place. We fully support its aims, which correspond to our Road Map vision for the future of community pharmacy. If you align the interests of patients, pharmacists and the NHS then you are on to a winner. But at the moment these interests are not always aligned. Better use of pharmacists' expertise can improve NHS care and the patient experience."

The review of NHS Pharmaceutical Care of Patients in the Community will be carried out by Dr Hamish Wilson, Vice Chairman of the Board of Healthcare Improvement Scotland, with support from Nick Barber, Professor of Pharmacy Practice at the University of London's School of Pharmacy. It will also consider the infrastructure needed to deliver pharmaceutical care fit for the 21st Century, the education, training and continuing professional development of pharmacists, and integrated working between hospital and primary care pharmacists.

## Chairman tells pharmacist "your actions were not sexually motivated"

A female pharmacist charged with requesting to see a patient's rash for a "sexually motivated reason", has been completely exonerated at a recent hearing of the Fitness to Practice Committee.

The complainant described how the pharmacist asked to discuss her medication after she presented a prescription for a 'rash'. The patient maintained that she was told that unless she showed the pharmacist the rash, which was in and around the anus and vagina, that she would not be given the tablets. She said that she felt so humiliated and upset that she, "cried all the way home". She complained to the PCT three days later and sought compensation from the pharmacist employer – which she received.

The PCT referred the pharmacist to the GPhC Fitness to Practice Directorate and an application was made for an Interim Suspension Order. Following the PDA's intervention the suspension was downgraded to an Order with Conditions of Practice. This allowed the pharmacist to continue in her role but put an onus on her to:

- inform any (future) employer that she was under investigation and for what,
- inform the GPhC of her whereabouts of practice at all times
- refrain from going into consultation rooms alone with patients.

At the full hearing some months later, the pharmacist's version was quite different to that given by the patient. She told the Committee that not only was the patient starting on the new medication but she also had six other items on the prescription which she wanted to discuss. In conversation about the medication it seemed appropriate to ask to see the 'rash', having been given the impression that it was on her arms and/



or neck. It was only when the patient immediately removed her trousers and undergarment that the pharmacist realised that it was in an intimate area and, shocked, she gestured to cover it up immediately.

The GPhC's advocate "strongly" put to her that she wanted to look at the rash "for professional curiosity and sexual excitement". We believe this to be an outrageous allegation and not one that even the complainant had made. Unfortunately in the PDAs experience pharmacists may have to face this hostile style of interrogation when they appear.

In rejecting all the allegations made against our member, the Chairman of the Committee said of the complainant - "[she] showed no sign of vulnerability". The medicines assistant on duty at the time remembered the patient leaving the pharmacy in a "bubbly" mood and showing no signs of trauma whatsoever.

Also based on the manner in which she gave evidence, he went on to determine that he could not imagine how she would have had difficulty in refusing a suggestion to do something (remove her clothing) that she didn't want to.

He lavished praise on the pharmacist when he said: "We found her to be an impressive witness and we expect she is an excellent pharmacist". The committee rejected the complainant's account and accepted our members.

The committee rejected the complainant's account and accepted our members version.

The Chairman intimated criticism of the patient when he said "We do not know why she has given the account that we have rejected and which will have caused the pharmacist so much distress but we reject her account and accept the registrants."

What motivated the patient to make such a complaint? The PDA believes that she may have been motivated by greed. Possibly going home and giving her account to others; she may have been told she could get compensation and decided to add credibility to her story by making a complaint to the PCT. She followed this up almost immediately with a claim for compensation, and the NPA paid out £500 on behalf of the pharmacist's employer. This may have been to protect the image of the pharmacy and to keep her quiet.

To what extent the NPA considered the pharmacists personal reputation is not known.

Pharmacists should beware of the dangers that can lie in wait when they invite patients into the consultation room, regardless of whether the patient is the same sex, and should insist that their employer has a comprehensive chaperone policy. This is a classic case of an excellent pharmacist unjustly being subjected to the humiliation of a public hearing, having been wrongly complained against.

The default position of the regulator has been to apply for a Suspension Order where there is a complaint of a sexual nature, whether proven or not. This of course would deprive the pharmacist of his/her livelihood whilst a full hearing was being prepared (sometimes a year hence). It has been of great comfort to those who have found themselves in such situations to have the PDA behind them. We now have much expertise in deterring the regulator from automatically applying for a Suspension Order in cases where there are uncorroborated allegations. There is now much more of a preparedness to negotiate conditions of practice whilst an investigation takes place.

# Medical Negligence, Professional Indemnity and the Pharmacist

## How does it work?

**SUE GRABBIT & RHUNE SOLICITORS LLP  
NO WIN - NO FEE!  
FREEPHONE 24 HOUR CLAIMS**



### The cost of claims: how can lawyers justify this?

Over the last eighteen months, a trend has emerged whereby lawyers' fees are exceeding the payments to claimants by a factor of as much as eleven to one. The PDA is dealing with one claim where compensation to the patient was agreed at £1,500, only to be presented with a lawyer's bill of in excess of £17,000.

Outside pharmacy, the most commonly known types of personal injury claim falls into categories such as road traffic accidents (RTAs), accidents at work and tripping accidents.

Causation (the link between the negligent act and the harm caused) in these sorts of personal injury claims is often difficult to prove. The defendant (the person against whom the claim is made) may deny liability and even if he erred may argue that the claimant has a pre-existing condition which has affected the injury. In some cases causation may even be denied altogether because it is contended that the injury or the extent of the injury was not caused by the accident. A minority of cases end up in court.

Medical negligence is another category of personal injury claim which lawyers are diverting their attention towards because there are no regulations preventing them from running up unnecessary costs.

Government has regulated legal fees and capped compensation for road traffic accident claims because they were getting out of hand and adding to the increase in premium for the average motorist.

The formula which drove up costs to such an extent that resulted in government intervention involved the use of a Conditional Fee Agreement (CFA) commonly known as a no-win-no-fee arrangement, which allows lawyers to claim an additional 100% of the costs that they have accrued on behalf of their client. This would be paid by the defendant if liability was admitted. The strategy therefore was for lawyers to identify a negligent act and work up a large bill of costs in proving causation before then approaching the defendant to admit liability and at the same time be able to claim their 100% success fee.

When dealing with dispensing incidents, there is minimal risk of the lawyer not receiving his/her fees – which is what the CFA was designed to support so as those who did not have the means to make a claim and could not find the money up front for legal fees were not denied justice. The link between the error and harm is easily determined and liability is limited to either the pharmacist's and/or the pharmacy owner's insurers. Our policy is to admit liability as soon

as we can establish that our member is liable - sometimes within days – in order to keep down any costs. Often we find that lawyers have milked the system by incurring what we consider to be unnecessary costs to which they add their success fee just because they are entitled to do so and because there is no regulation stopping them.

There has been public outrage following the publication of a report in August that negligence claims against the NHS had increased by 30% to £867 million over the previous year, well over a quarter of which went directly to lawyers. The PDA understands that the Ministry of Justice is about to act on the Jackson review of civil litigation costs, which recommended that success fees should not be recoverable which will hopefully restrain currently allowable but in many people's eyes, unjustifiable lawyers costs.

In the meantime, members can help us keep down the cost of claims by informing the PDA as soon as they become aware that a patient has been administered the wrong medication, have been shown a letter or given an indication that a claim is likely or have been approached for their Policy number in the aftermath of an incident. The sooner we know the quicker we can act and members should NEVER assume that a claim will not be made against them.

### A dispensing incident; it's your car crash!

What do you do when you are involved in an accident with your car? This is what Direct Line insurers advise;

Make sure you get the names, addresses and phone numbers of any drivers, passengers or pedestrians involved, and details of any witnesses. By law, drivers must provide details of their insurance company and their policy number.

A diagram of the accident scene is often helpful. Try to draw one as soon as possible after the accident – show vehicles, the road layout, other relevant features and the positions of any witnesses. Gathering this information may help ensure that information about the incident is correct and may prevent inaccurate or exaggerated claims from third parties later on.

Do not admit blame or liability for an accident or offer to pay for any damage.

if it had been documented or evidenced through the inspection of the packaging and witnessed would have been vital in defending a large claim for compensation.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to dispute causation (the link between the negligent act and the harm allegedly caused) following a dispensing error when there is so much medical information available to the public. Allegations of adverse effects are difficult to disprove whether they are real, imagined, or plainly fabricated. Technically the onus of causation is the patient's to prove but armed with little information the pharmacist will be left in a difficult position if the patient says they suffered certain credible side effects and there is no information to disprove their version of events. In reality if a case went to court – an extremely costly exercise and one insurers would want to avoid – the judge would almost certainly rule for the claimant because the negligence is a 'given' and they will determine that there must be some harm as a result.

In this case the PDA had no option other than to pay out a sizeable compensation to the patient based on her version of events as proving otherwise would have been very difficult indeed. The result could have been so different had the pharmacist collected the required evidence at the time.

When a dispensing error happens therefore, a pharmacist should look on this as his or her car crash and automatically assume that damage has been done and where possible find out potentially what it might be and to what extent.

It is vital that when a pharmacist becomes aware of a dispensing error that they follow a simple procedure in the way car drivers instinctively do.

1. Check that the patient is well and if necessary direct them to a place where they can get a medical assessment. If they have already had medical attention, find out what this was; this could be important information when settling a claim. It is important to notify the patient's doctor about any error where there is the potential for harm to be caused.
2. Apologise for the incident but do not admit liability. Phrases such as "I am sorry that the error has happened"

and "I will look into it to see how it has occurred" are acceptable. Saying "I am sorry that I made an error and caused you harm" is not and will usually lead to problems later. Do not write to the patient without seeking advice from the PDA first.

3. Obtain as much information about the usage of the erroneous medication as possible; the pack from which the medication was taken, how many doses have been removed and how feasible it would be for the patient to have taken so many or used so much in the time since the error. If the patient is reluctant to give you the offending article then it may be a sign that s/he is going to make a claim or a complaint against you and it is not unreasonable to ask if you can take a photograph of the pack and its contents. Check the PMRs to establish how many packs were dispensed and try to retrieve them to ensure that there are no other offending packs. Where evidence has been obtained ensure that it is not discarded.

4. Make contemporaneous notes of what the patient told you and try to ensure that a witness is present so as you can verify the story told at the time.
5. Make sure that you inform the superintendent pharmacist through the normal channels of error reporting.
6. Immediately report the incident to your insurer.

Investigating a dispensing error is an important exercise and should be done by pharmacists as a matter of course even if this causes inconvenience e.g. if a pharmacist has to return to a pharmacy that they no longer work at – but putting errors right is part of the job and investigating a dispensing error is part of that.

The PDA aims to deal with claims for compensation promptly and to agree a figure that reflects any genuine harm caused. It does so to minimise the risk of further complaints being made against members and to keep membership fee increases to an absolute minimum.

Direct Line leads with a strap line "Help us to help you". The PDA echoes that sentiment and urges all pharmacists to play their part in a thorough investigation which will enable us to make just and fair settlements on your behalf.

# Shifting costs from secondary to primary care – the emerging new role for pharmacists

For the last two years, the PDA has been consulting and engaging with stakeholders about how pharmacy could contribute solutions to the unprecedented financial challenges currently facing the NHS.

This article provides a glimpse on the work to date which we have called the PDA ROAD MAP.

## The PDA Road Map proposals

"The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."

**Albert Einstein**

Central to these proposals is the principle that the unique skills possessed by members of the primary healthcare team can be used to much better effect than is currently the case and with much greater integration. Our proposals harness the under utilised potential of the pharmacist as an individual healthcare practitioner and the community pharmacy network as a resource in a way that seeks to increase GP surgery capacity. In turn we argue that GP surgeries should be able to reduce the number of costly hospital and unnecessary A&E presentations.

Community pharmacists regularly express their desire to deliver a wider range of clinical services; yet the relentless increase in dispensing volume and the focus on ensuring safety means pharmacists are spending more time involved in dispensing activities.

As a consequence, they are generally less available to counsel patients and provide clinical care to support patients.

However, it is important to emphasise that pharmacists involved in the dispensing process are not in any way a wasted resource.

Over more than two decades, community pharmacy has risen to the efficiency challenges set out in its current contractual arrangements. Contractors have driven harder bargains with medicines suppliers on behalf of the NHS and have delivered the second lowest prices for generic medicines and one of the most efficient supply chains in the world.

Furthermore, it has also been shown that pharmacy delivers a very low error rate of 4 in 10,000 – a very safe supply process. It will be important for these solid achievements to continue and whilst we advocate a greater use of skill mix and technology, we do not advocate removing the pharmacist from the supply process in the community pharmacy setting.

## A more integrated primary care model

We argue that every pharmacy must have a pharmacist who is central to the routine operation of the pharmacy work. This 'patient-facing pharmacist' should be both visible and accessible. Although continuing to ensure a safe supply of medicines to the public, via skill mix and a greater reliance on pharmacy technicians, the 'patient facing pharmacist' should largely not be involved in the physical act of dispensing. This pharmacist would be ideally placed to focus upon medicines wastage, adverse drug reaction and a compliance agenda delivering improved benefits to patients and reducing costs. They should also provide a minor ailments service – where patients that otherwise would present at the GPs surgery, would instead be treated in community pharmacy.

In a proportion of pharmacies a second pharmacist - a 'clinic pharmacist' could provide more advanced services as currently provided by GP surgeries to stable patients with long term conditions. We argue that the 'clinic pharmacist' would spend more time with a patient on more complex medication regimes in the pharmacy than the GP is currently able to in the surgery. This enables the pharmacist's unique skill to be fully used to improve clinical outcomes and ultimately reduce hospital admissions from this significant group of patients.

The 'clinic pharmacist' would do this on a registered patient and planned care basis.

"Given that pharmacists are medication experts and Long Term Condition prevalence is likely to increase in line with the ageing population, pharmacy should have a greater role in treating Long Term Conditions, helping to optimise the use of medicines, reduce waste and monitor health goals."

**Bow Group Report 2010**

We believe that these developments will produce a significant shift of patients away from the GP and into community pharmacy. We propose that the additional GP capacity thus created would need to be orientated in such a way so that many patients currently presenting in secondary care could be seen instead in primary care – in the GP surgery.

We believe that this new, integrated approach will:

- Improve the patient journey and provide more convenient and timely access to services;
- Create capacity to enable services to shift to primary care so commissioners are able to rebalance secondary care capacity;
- Improve outcomes for patients and avoid significant numbers of unplanned hospital admissions
- Encourage self-care and active participation in care.

## The change imperative

Doing things differently opens up many new possibilities to deliver integrated care. GPs currently undertake the bulk of routine care of patients with long term conditions (LTCs) resulting in overloaded surgeries. This means regular patients get to see their GP for only a few minutes and can often end up being absent from work for at least half a day. It is therefore unsurprising that many patients feel they have no alternative but to present at the local A&E department and parents in particular are bypassing their GP and taking their children to the emergency department for common childhood ailments.

It is also easy to see how the current system can leave patients confused about their medication, ultimately resulting in a waste of medicines, poor compliance, at risk of adverse drug reactions or more prone to costly admissions to hospital.

In community pharmacy, we believe that the current model is now at breaking point. Our experience with MURs in England teaches us that the existing contractual arrangements are not driving quality. We believe that the more advanced clinical services should be commissioned separately and in addition to any existing traditional contractual arrangements for the supply function. In such an arrangement, specialist 'clinic pharmacists' freed from the responsibility of the dispensing process could focus upon and be truly accountable for quality and outcomes.

To succeed, this model would need to engage large numbers of pharmacists. Our surveys indicate that many practicing pharmacists from all sectors of practice; many with specialist qualifications such as independent prescribers would be keen to undertake this new work.

## Increase General Practice Capacity

"Practice capacity will be critical in determining practices' ability to improve patients' experience of urgent care."

**Steve Field Chairman of Council, RCGP; Laurence Buckman, Chairman, BMA GP Committee**

An improved practice capacity would enable GPs to gear their operations to being able to handle the more acute presentations so that patients would not have to resort to A&E attendance for urgent care.

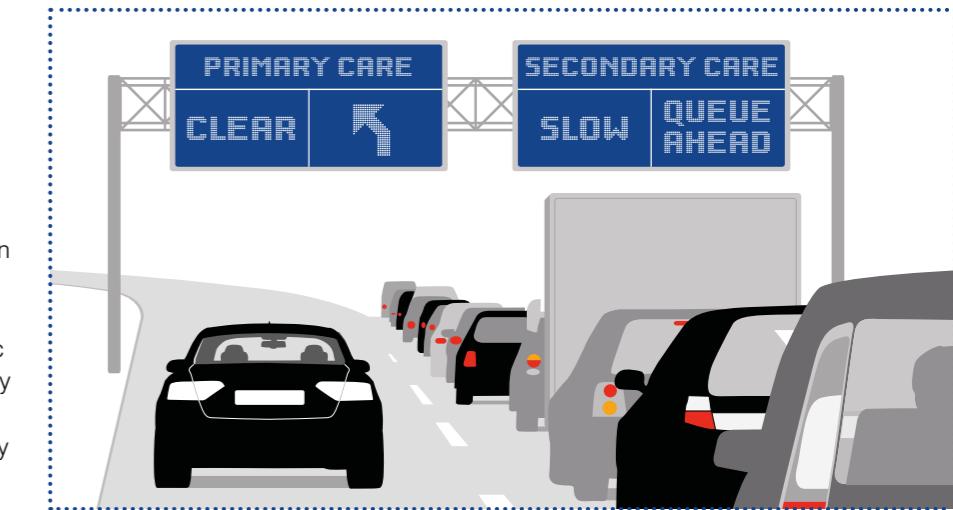
## Focus upon reducing unnecessary hospital admissions

There are nearly five and a half million emergency hospital admissions in the UK per annum which cost more than £12 billion. The sheer size of this cost means that the PDA proposal would be a prize, well worth pursuing and could be delivered through:

- a) Reducing hospital admissions through greater access to urgent Care

Surgeries with enhanced capacity should become more orientated to handling acute presentations. Many GPs are frustrated when they learn that their patients presented at their local A&E for conditions that they could easily have dealt with at surgery level.

- b) Preventing hospital admissions through smarter care of patients



They would apply their specialist knowledge of medicines and deliver high quality pharmaceutical care in a way that is difficult to deliver under current GP arrangement.

## Statistics that support this model;

1. A recent study, (York and London 2010), estimated that wasted medicines in England cost £300 million with around half of this being preventable.
2. The National Patient Safety Agency estimates that avoidable hospital admissions due to adverse drug reactions cost the NHS around £359 million per year.
3. A further study found poor compliance was associated with both higher costs and poorer outcomes - resulting in a further £750 million of preventable cost.

When combined, the better use of the skills of the pharmacist and the GP delivers considerably enhanced NHS efficiencies whilst at the same time substantial improvements in the patient journey.

## What next?

This feature briefly describes the general direction of the PDA's Road Map initiative. We believe it represents a significant opportunity for pharmacist role development and could provide an excellent future for those pharmacists currently in the grip of NHS re-organisation. The full programme will be officially launched in the New Year. We urge all pharmacists to seriously consider the role that they could play in this new scenario and how to turn this vision into reality.





# The most rewarding job in pharmacy

PDA Union reps have saved the reputations and careers of numerous fellow pharmacists. Four of them describe the challenges they face and why they love their job...

Nothing can beat the satisfaction of helping a fellow pharmacist to get their job back. The role of a PDA Union rep is a challenging one, representing members in a wide variety of cases and scenarios, but the satisfaction of delivering what is often career-saving advice and support can be huge.

Union reps are dedicated individuals representing the rights of individual pharmacists who would otherwise be unsupported in their fight for a fair hearing from their employers. Reps are backed up by PDA central office, but when feelings run high in disciplinary meetings, the rep must be quick thinking, calm, assertive and eloquent. This is not a job for the faint hearted.

There is no such thing as an ordinary day for a PDA Union rep, but their involvement in a case typically begins

when head office sends them all the relevant background information. Preparation is key, as case notes can be hefty and members can need a lot of support. Even apparently simple cases can be more complicated than they appear. Shenaz describes this preparation as good CPD, often needing to refresh her memory on points of employment and professional law.

The rep then contacts the member to discuss the case, sometimes calling several times to build up a rapport. "The critically important thing is that the chemistry is right between the rep and the member," says Jim. The rep will consider the case from the pharmacist's point of view, particularly on matters relating to professional issues. They will compare expected outcomes from the PDA perspective with that of the member.

Members from all over the country need support from the PDA, and travelling to meetings can often take longer than the meeting itself. The rep will usually arrive early to meet the member beforehand, to discuss the case, explain their role and explain the likely outcome. This can range from a decision made on the day to a decision in writing in five days time.

Reps' case loads fluctuate, from only two or three meetings a year to up to 70. Common cases involve both community and hospital pharmacists and pre-registration students. They can include:

- Disciplinary matters
- Employment issues, such as changes to contract terms
- Grievances – both from members and about members
- Appeals against dismissals
- Return to work interviews.

## The role of the rep

The tone and professionalism of meetings vary considerably, with their effectiveness often depending on the experience and approach of the employer representative. If the employer representative is a store manager they may have had no previous experience or training, and can be as nervous as the member. Meetings in the hospital setting are generally professionally run, often with an HR manager present.

Members can be extremely nervous and unsure what to expect. It is up to the rep to ensure that they put their case across as well as possible, while being realistic about the likely outcome. "I tell them if you've done something wrong there will be a penalty to pay, but I will make sure that you get a fair hearing," says Richard.

Employers' attitudes vary widely, but they can be aggressive and are often unhappy that their employee is being represented. Many are not used to dealing with pharmacy specific representation.

The rep's role is to advise the member, and ensure that procedures are followed and members' rights to representation are upheld. Support and advice during the meeting can include reminding the member of things they have forgotten because they are upset, and advising them when a break is appropriate.

Employers can try and prevent the Union rep from contributing to the meeting, so the rep must be forthright in explaining their rights. "You've got to think on your feet as much as possible," says Richard Flynn. Reps can advise the member, but are not allowed to answer a direct question put to the member. They can also ask for an adjournment to the meeting if they want to seek advice from the PDA office.



"The role of the pharmacist is not really understood at all by so many in terms of how much responsibility it carries. You're often just seen as retailers."

The unfairness of some cases can be quite shocking. Manish describes a case where the employer offered to type up the notes from a meeting because the note taker's handwriting was so poor. Manish was convinced that the notes were doctored during the typing up.

In another case a member had been dismissed, apparently based on CCTV evidence, for using their phone in work time. When Manish insisted on viewing the CCTV records it turned out that the member had only been on the phone for half as long as the employer claimed, and in one instance the tape showed that she had not been on her phone at all.

Richard describes a case where the interviewing manager was 20 minutes late. Then he discovered that the note taker was to be the manager who had made the complaint about the member. Richard complained about both points, and got the note taker changed.

"This gave the clear message that I wasn't going to be messed around. I'm not saying you go in aggressively but they have to know that you're not just going to acquiesce."

## Drawing on valuable experience

All union reps are pharmacists and therefore ideally qualified to understand the practical and professional issues members face. They also have a wide range of pharmacy experience that they can bring to discussions.

Jim's management career with Boots, culminating with a post as retail implementation director, helps him to see both sides of any dispute. "This is about seeing things done rightly and fairly, and then you are helping the corporation as well as the member. If there's been a wrongdoing on the part of the employer and it goes the way you want it to, then next time the employer will hopefully improve their procedures. And if the employee wins the case then that's a 'win win'. At the end of the day we're all part of the one big profession." Shenaz's experience in training and development at Boots, and as an operational manager with Sainsbury's, proves useful. "Sometimes you need to see things from both sides - even though at the end of the day you're still trying to support the member, it sometimes involves a bit of a reality check."

But she admits that times are hard for employees. "Employers don't seem to be taking any prisoners at the moment. If they don't want you because you don't fit or because you're not a yes person they will try and get rid of you."

And non-pharmacist managers are increasingly taking out grievances against pharmacists, she says.

## The qualities of a good Union rep

"Openness, honesty and integrity are important qualities in a rep because you have to be able to build up a rapport with the member. And it's almost as important to be able to build up a rapport with the employer."

**Jim**

"You have to be Teflon coated - you can't let these things get to you because if you do you're not going to be able to do your best for the member."

**Manish**

"Union reps should have the ability to think on their feet, to be objective, to think strategically and tactically and have an ability to not be cowed. They should also have integrity, a degree of eloquence and enthusiasm."

**Richard**

## Job satisfaction

"If it goes the way you want it to and you see the members face light up, that gives you a real buzz."

**Jim**

"It's the only job I would like to do full time if I could. It is also the only job where I have to use my full range of competencies from previous jobs."

**Shenaz**

"I come away feeling absolutely elated. One of the reasons I do this is that I just don't like the way that the big companies are treating people – they're asking more and more for less and less."

**Richard**

## Meet your reps



**Shenaz Patel,**  
based in Newark



**Manish Patel,**  
based in Brighton



**Jim Durrand,**  
based near  
Nottingham



**Richard Flynn,**  
based near  
Newcastle

# Customer Driven Profiling and protecting your rights

Customer driven profiling is a term that those who work for Alliance Boots will be familiar with but the principle should be familiar to everyone. In essence it is where a business need has been identified and a corresponding change to the working hours or pattern of an employee is proposed by the company to meet that need. When all parties agree, there is no problem and the employment contract is varied by mutual consent; however if the employee does not accept the proposals then in most cases a revised work pattern can only be imposed where a legitimate business objective exists and proportionate means are used to achieve this. The PDA Union has been contacted by a number of pharmacists whose personal and family lives have been threatened with great disruption by the CDP exercise. Members report that business objectives put forward have been ill defined and little attention has been paid to the personal circumstances of the individual. Fortunately for these members the PDA Union has developed a very successful strategy to help members resist unwarranted changes and as a result has exposed serious failings in the processes being applied. In a number of cases the proposals have been dropped or substantially watered down in favour of the member.

**Two recent cases highlight some of the problems encountered by members:**

## The Pharmacy must stay open all day

One company manager informed a PDA pharmacist member that “*we need to ensure that we have [sic] 7 day mindset to ensure that the pharmacy is open for all trading hours of the store*”. The pharmacist was informed that he would not be able to take a lunch break away from the store, but had to remain in the pharmacy all day. If he didn’t acquiesce to this demand he would either have to move onto the relief team or be dismissed from his employment. The pharmacist had always been flexible and took his lunch break to suit the business and was upset at being treated this way. The PDA Union legal advisors knew that the company proposals were unlawful because this pharmacist merely wanted to take the breaks he is entitled to in his contract and under the relevant legislation. He could not be forced out of his place of work for exerting his statutory rights to have a break. He immediately sought the assistance of the PDA Union who attended a meeting with the employee and his manager. The company manager was ill prepared and even informed our member that there were no other pharmacies in the area which could accommodate his wish to have a lunch break. The pharmacist was left with a stark choice of either being forced to work through his lunch break or having his employment terminated. The PDA Union representative made it clear the manager had got it badly wrong and his approach was untenable under employment law and prevented the pharmacist from complying with the Code of Ethics. A few days after the meeting there was a disturbing development when the manager remonstrated with our member both in the pharmacy consultation room and the tea room. Our member felt at one stage the manager was going to assault him and was so concerned by this behaviour a grievance was raised; the member was supported throughout by a PDA Union representative. The outcome of the grievance, heard at a senior level, was that the manager admitted to behaviour that could be seen as intimidating and assurances were given that appropriate steps would be taken to ensure he did not behave in the same way again. Also the threat to force our member out of the store was lifted pending the announcement that there was shortly to be a supportive company communication regarding pharmacist lunch breaks. Although this case was concluded several months ago, this communication has yet to be issued.

## Changing weekend working hours; Boots say “sorry”!

Alliance Boots management were forced to admit that they got it hopelessly wrong by threatening a pharmacist with dismissal as part of the Customer Driven Profiling (CDP) project, if she wouldn’t move out of the store she had worked in for fifteen years. This debacle arose in a flagship store in the North of England, despite the availability of specialist employee relations staff to advise the management team on the process.

CDP is supposed to be a rigorous process with documented meetings and the manager is instructed to read from a carefully prepared script. Our member was put through the CDP process over the phone without even being informed of the nature or purpose of the discussions. One telephone call received at 7.30 am, was to discuss her working pattern. These calls were later represented as ‘informal’ meetings which constituted stage one and two of the CDP exercise and notes were purported to have been taken which our member was unaware of at the time.

The PDA member lost faith in her manager’s ability to handle the matter fairly at an early stage and declined to attend any further “informal meetings” forming part of the CDP process because she believed the new working pattern had been predetermined. The company had failed to provide a valid business reason for wanting her to change from Sunday to Saturday working in a different location. They also failed to take into consideration the alternative proposals she had put forward or her personal family circumstances.

The pharmacist wrote to say that she did not want to attend a third informal meeting and would prefer to go straight to the next stage where she could bring along a PDA Union representative. Upon receipt of this letter, she was then threatened with a charge of gross misconduct (failing

to follow a reasonable management instruction) if she would not meet informally to discuss the matter and faced being disciplined.

Finally the company agreed to a meeting conducted with the help of a PDA Union representative. Her complaints about the process she was put through were treated seriously and upheld unequivocally and she was informed she could retain her current role. Although rather late in the day, it was commendable that Alliance Boots were prepared to admit their failings and issue an apology.

The Company’s embarrassment was summed up when the manager who heard the grievance wrote *“I would like to sincerely apologise to you for the fundamental failure to follow the company’s CDP guidance properly from the outset of this process and I am extremely disappointed that you have suffered so much distress as a result.”*

John Murphy, PDA Union General Secretary commented. “Thank goodness she sought expert advice from the PDA legal team. What worries me is how many others have been ridden roughshod over and given in to the constant pressure from management to change their working pattern regardless of their personal circumstances or whether there are even valid reasons for the change in the first place”



## PDA warns pharmacists not to compromise their standards when pressurised to reach MUR targets

The PDA has told pharmacists that they must not report MURs which cannot be later verified, just to appease their manager’s insistence to reach targeted levels.

An increasing number of pharmacists have found themselves dismissed and reported to the GPhC by their employer for this practice.

“We are very concerned at this trend even though we recognise the unrelenting harassment managers exert just to bump up the MUR payments,” said John Murphy the General Secretary of the PDA Union

“However pharmacists must be aware that regardless of the vile tactics used to pressurise them into doing MURs, misreporting to the NHS or the employer is a serious fraudulent practice and some employers will sacrifice them just to protect their relationship with the PCT. As well as dismissal for gross misconduct pharmacists can face a counter fraud investigation and the threat of regulatory sanctions including removal from the register, which comes as a complete surprise to many who find themselves in this situation.

One pharmacist who found herself in this situation reported that she had received two telephone calls every day from her manager to ask whether she had done any MURs; she admits that she succumbed just “to get him off my back.” Others maintain that they perform them over the counter, but John Murphy points out, “It is tempting to complete MURs over the counter to save time or decide to write them up later at a quieter time. However If asked, patients may not be able to recall having an MUR if further enquiries are made and serious questions are then asked about whether the consultation actually took place”.



The PDA is warning pharmacists that they must therefore not be tempted to report inaccurate information about their MUR performance because it will come back to haunt them and can severely damage their professional livelihood.

John Murphy did reflect “Employers need to start asking themselves why is it that perfectly honest people who have shown integrity in every other respect in their professional and personal lives suddenly commit a ‘dishonest’ act which does not benefit them in any material way whatsoever. Employers really do need to start taking their responsibility seriously in this regard”.

Some managers can be intimidating and disciplinary measures are frequently threatened for non delivery of MUR targets. Pharmacists should be aware that the PDA Union has a very successful track record in helping pharmacists who feel under unreasonable pressure to deliver. This includes the removal of performance plans, lower targets and in some cases disciplinary action being taken against area managers for their behaviour.

# Pension and Retirement Planning



The PDA established the PDA PLUS partner programme to provide members with a raft of preferentially negotiated services the purpose of which was to make their lives and those of their families easier and also to reduce the costs of certain transactions. Originally the programme provided discounts on items like holidays, meals, wines and cinema tickets etc. More recently, the PDA PLUS programme has provided members with access to service providers and now members can rely on the PDA PLUS programme to support them in areas like completing their CPD, completing their tax returns, organising protection in the event that they are off sick from work and more recently by providing support with their financial planning. In this special feature, the PDA seeks to provide members with some wider insight into the importance of planning for retirement and has teamed up with PDA PLUS partner Lloyd Whyte to survey member's opinions about their retirement plans. The survey has provided some interesting results.

## PDA Survey Results

The survey conducted by the Pharmacist's Defence Association and run in conjunction with a PDA PLUS partner Lloyd & Whyte and independent Financial Advisor, received well over 1,000 responses and has revealed a worrying lack of understanding of pension and retirement planning among PDA members.

According to the survey, 79% of PDA members want to retire by the time they are 65 with 16% stating they want to retire at 55. Despite wanting to retire before the State Pension age of 68, a substantial 64% of respondents have not sought any independent financial advice about how to provide for their retirement.

## Realising Your Objectives

Knowing what you want to do when you retire is the first step to retirement planning. 56% of survey respondents would like to travel or pursue hobbies in retirement, yet a significant 36% had not considered their retirement plans.

Planning for your retirement is essential -the old adage of "fail to plan, you plan to fail" is very much the case. Take a medical condition as an example, you start with diagnosis of the problem, you then prescribe a remedy, but it is as equally important to review the progress of the condition and make sure the medicine prescribed is working and achieving the goal that is required.

## Financing Your Retirement

When you have decided how you would like to spend your retirement, you can decide how much income you will need. 36% of respondents would like to have an income of half their current annual salary.

For example, a community pharmacist earning approximately £30,000 per annum in full time employment might anticipate wanting an annual income of £15,000 upon retirement. With the average population expecting to live for at least 15 years after retirement, this could mean the pharmacist will need a retirement fund of at least £300,000 (taking into account a Tax Free Cash lump sum as well as an income).

It is troubling that 39% of respondents either don't know how to calculate their retirement income or have never considered how much income they might require. This is especially concerning considering the age at which the majority of pharmacists are looking to retire.

When considering how much you need to save for retirement it is worth remembering what could lie ahead in your future. For example, 60% of respondents stated they were the main earners in their household, would this change if you decided to start a family? How would you manage your pension contributions if you were unable to work?

## Funding Options

55% of respondents plan to use a pension to fund their retirement, yet a worrying 58% are not currently part of a pension scheme or have any form of pension provision. 28% of those not in a pension scheme do have the option to join a scheme offered by their employer.

Pensions provide a tax efficient savings plan which accumulates over your working life. In an employer scheme, your employer may also make contributions alongside your own, which over time can make a significant difference to your final retirement fund. If you are able to join a pension scheme provided by your employer it is recommended that you do so as contributions benefit from tax relief.

70% of respondents do not know how much the State Pension provides. The current basic State Pension for a single person is £102.15 (source: [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)) per week, although some people get less than this.

There are many ways to help provide for your retirement, from purchasing a property with plans to let, to investments such as ISAs and investment bonds, each have their own risks.

Our experience has shown that many people view their home as part of their retirement fund, because when they retire they believe they will not need 4 bedrooms, however when they have retired, they find that they wish to spend more time with their families, children have now brought them grandchildren, all of whom need a room in which to sleep. This is why it is essential to have a plan, review the plan and reassess the situation on an ongoing basis.

The best funding options will depend on your circumstances. An Independent Financial Adviser can discuss with you how the options work and how much you should be contributing.

With the volatility that we are currently seeing across global markets it is more important than ever to make sure that your pension fund is invested in the best way for your circumstances, and review the progress of your plans on a regular basis. Many people who have a pension plan have a sense of achievement, because they have a pension. If that plan is not reviewed and the outcomes are unknown and understood, then regardless of the level of contribution, the pension may not deliver what is required.

A strategy of investing your money into a single investment fund within the pension can increase the level of investment risk that you are taking and leave you exposed to a fund that may or may not perform.

A recent study by Standard Life found that 90% of all investment returns come from the correct asset allocation. This means not having all of your eggs in one basket. Spreading your investments in a strategic way will provide you with the best chance of a positive return. So whether you are starting a new pension plan, or have existing pension plans in place, it is essential to review the performance and understand the likely returns that you are going to have and what level of income this will give you when you retire.

## Seeking Advice

Of the respondents who have sought advice about their pension and retirement plan, 65% consulted an Independent Financial Adviser. By seeing a qualified professional, these respondents have benefited from advice that is specific to their situation and ongoing requirements. Independent advisers are not tied to any one product provider so advice is provided based on what is best for you.

Whether you are approaching retirement or have just started your career as a pharmacist, it is never too early or late to consider your retirement plan. You should be comfortable that your retirement plan will provide you with your desired standard of living. If you are unsure or would like to discuss any aspect of this article in greater detail, PDA Plus can help. Our team of independent financial advisers offer expert financial knowledge and understand the unique requirements of the healthcare profession.

**PDA Members wishing to speak to PDA PLUS partner Lloyd Whyte should call 01823 250750 to speak to an adviser.**

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# Pre Reg; problems with final sign off

The pre reg training year is a time of crucial importance for aspiring pharmacists. The transition from novice pharmacy graduate through to a registered pharmacist requires hard work, a committed tutor and a supportive learning environment.

One of the most reputable providers of pre-reg training is Alliance Boots; three recent cases involving this company have caused the PDA to question the judgement of a small number of tutors and the quality of support available to those students whose tutors have concerns about their performance. All three students who contacted the PDA Union were overseas students and successful registration as a pharmacist was crucial to their ability to stay and work in the UK. Any failure meant a risk of deportation back to their home country.

The PDA Union was contacted by three Alliance Boots pre-regs who had all been informed in June or July 2011 that they were not going to be signed off by their tutors as suitable to register as a pharmacist. The company was therefore terminating their employment on the grounds of capability. This had come as a terrible shock to all of them, as only weeks previously, all three had been signed off as satisfactory at the 39 weeks appraisal stage. One student was informed that the company would not contemplate extending the training period to help him reach the standards expected. Another was initially offered extended training time which was subsequently cut short and the date of termination brought forward. The final student was offered an extension but then learnt it would be a futile exercise as the tutor indicated she would never agree to sign him off regardless of any extension.

The 39 weeks appraisal is a key milestone in a pre-reg student's training. A satisfactory sign off permits entry to the exam and is a clear indication that progress towards a final sign off at 52 weeks is on track. The GPhC gives unequivocal guidance in their tutor information pack as follows:-



*A satisfactory Progress report 3 is vital for the trainee to be eligible to take the Registration Examination. Therefore, if you do not feel confident that the trainee is ready to take the Examination or that they are not at the appropriate level based on 39 weeks of training, then you should not mark their Progress report 3 as satisfactory.*

One student who contacted the PDA early on, wanted to exercise his right to take a PDA Union representative into the meeting convened to terminate his employment. However he reported being given confusing information by company managers about his right to have representation at this meeting and was then placed under unwarranted pressure to attend on his own. The PDA Union intervened to ensure he was able to attend the meeting properly represented. After robust submissions were made by the Union representative about misleading and contradictory information the student had been given, the company backed down and agreed that his training would be extended to allow an opportunity for him to demonstrate the standards required.

The other two students unfortunately only contacted the PDA weeks after they had already been dismissed; however

even at this late stage the PDA Union team felt they could rescue the situation and help these individuals who faced a very uncertain future. The PDA Union immediately wrote to the pharmacy superintendent to alert him to what appeared to be failings in the quality of support provided to some pre reg students in Alliance Boots, and individual grievances were also submitted. The students attended grievance meetings accompanied by a senior PDA representative specialising in pre reg issues, who drew attention to apparent failures in the level of support provided by the company and their tutors in these particular cases. The key question to resolve was why had students, who had earlier been graded as satisfactory at a key assessment stage, unexpectedly found themselves facing dismissal by the company with limited or no opportunity to have additional training.

Supported by the PDA Union, the students provided an account of their experience to a senior company manager who agreed to investigate what had happened. The Union representative was able to highlight documentary evidence which backed up the students claims that the level of

support provided by their tutors was not sufficient. Communication problems were given as one of the reasons these students were not being signed off and further information was requested about this at the meeting. The students also wanted reassurance that less favourable treatment due to their race was not a factor and an information request was submitted to the company seeking data about the ethnic origin of other students within the company who had had their employment terminated after a satisfactory 39 week appraisal.

From the students' description to us of their training and the results of preliminary investigations completed by the company that we have seen, there appeared to be very little structured or documented support provided after the 39 weeks stage to help the pre reg improve their performance in areas they were felt to be having difficulties in. One student whose first language was English and had been recruited through a telephone interview was told that customers had repeatedly complained they could not understand him, but yet he was never informed of this problem until late into his training, nor were any specific examples provided. The company's approach to this apparent problem was to tell him to watch some English movies. The other student found that it was almost impossible to take training time because of the requirements to help out in the dispensary when they were short of staff or busy. This caused him problems when trying to keep on top of the huge amount of work needed to progress through the training programme.

One student had been receiving a series of letters congratulating her on being selected to join the company as a permanent pharmacist, only for this offer to be abruptly withdrawn a few weeks later in a letter from a Professional Resourcing Manager containing the following text;

*"Please be aware that that this means we will inform the Home Office that as of the 1st September 2011 you will no longer be eligible to work in the UK under your current visa provision.*

*Meanwhile may we take this opportunity to wish you every success in the future."*

She was understandably confused by the mixed messages she was receiving. Company letters confirming a job offer based upon her performance and a managerial recommendation were complimentary about her skills and qualities, but yet her tutor was now saying she would not be signed off at all.

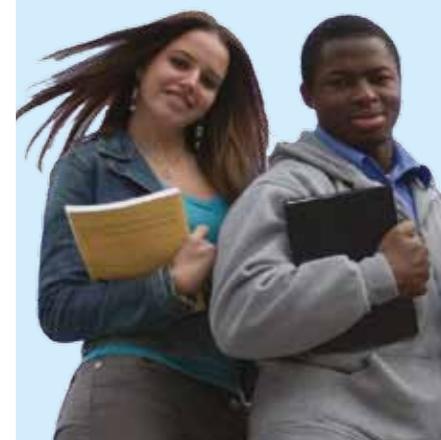
The investigations took a number of weeks and the PDA was disappointed that it had to repeatedly chase the investigating managers for a response. In finally reaching its decision, although Alliance Boots did not concede that the training and support provided was insufficient, it did admit that company communications were "conflicting and confusing", there was a lack of documentation outside formal appraisals, insufficient consideration was given to extending employment and recognition that a tutor did not follow GPhC guidance when conducting appraisals. Most importantly both students were offered reinstatement back into the company training programme with a different tutor. The company took 6 weeks from the initial request to provide a response to the request for data on the race of other pre reg students terminated in similar circumstances. Alliance Boots vigorously denied that discrimination was a factor in the treatment of these students.

Although it was only after the intervention of the PDA Union, to the company's credit it did offer to reinstate the pre regs back into employment with another tutor and backtracked on its decision to refuse extended training time. Hopefully the intervention of the PDA Union in these cases will prompt a review within the company to ensure that no other student will have to go through the same experience in the future.

Whilst these three students were employed by Alliance Boots, similar problems can arise in other companies. At the earliest sign of problems it is important to involve the PDA union if a pre-reg feels there may be issues with their training or that they may not be able to register at the end of their training.

## TOP TIPS

- Many organisations stipulate that a pre reg is entitled to a number of 'ring-fenced' hours per week protected training time to be agreed with the tutor. It is the responsibility of the pre reg to take this time and seek help from the tutor or teacher practitioner if it is proving difficult to take this.
- Any appraisal that indicates progress is less than satisfactory should be taken very seriously. A student should meet regularly with their tutor to agree an action plan to address any shortfalls in performance. This plan should be regularly reviewed to ensure progress is being made and any training identified has been implemented.
- If a student is invited to a termination meeting to consider their employment being ended, it is imperative that the PDA Union is contacted at an early stage. Early involvement of the PDA Union can often help resolve problems and ensure that the interests of the pre reg are protected.



# IS IT WORTH A CANDLE?

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Protecting an individual pharmacist, in the event that something has gone wrong, requires the spirited defence of that individual. The PDA is solely focused on the pharmacist and does not concern itself with protecting the employer. In some cases, we even draw attention to the liability that should rest with the employer.

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**How can their defence offering ever avoid the conflict of interest that exists?**

**What is the likelihood that employer funded indemnity lawyers would act in a way that is detrimental to the interests of the employer?**

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