

Executive summary

Chapter 1 – Professionalism: the differences between healthcare professionals and healthcare technicians

The first section of the report considers the definition of professionalism from various perspectives. The differences between healthcare professionals and healthcare technicians, the underpinning behaviours and characteristics of a profession and the role of a professional body in supporting professionalism are examined and described. It is of fundamental importance that the public must not be confused or misled about the respective capabilities of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

The development of hospital pharmacy practice in the late 1970s and 1980s involved identifying and developing the roles of pharmacists and establishing a career framework and associated skills and salary escalator. Subsequently, the roles of pharmacy technicians were developed to support the pharmacist's role. The vision for hospital pharmacy was first established and then the skill mix arrangements were subsequently developed to support that vision. The government should adopt the lessons that this provides in its approach to community pharmacy practice. This would help to ensure an appropriate interplay between the roles of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

Because of these historical hospital pharmacy developments, hospital pharmacy technicians are comprehensively more organised, better resourced and far more advanced in their levels of training and expertise than are their community pharmacy colleagues. Pharmacy policy makers must not use hospital pharmacy technicians as exemplars of the roles and responsibilities that can be safely undertaken by community pharmacy technicians until a much wider, planned and properly-executed re-engineering of community pharmacy practice takes place.

A table of key differences between pharmacists and pharmacy technicians (for example in relation to education, training and regulation) can be found in Appendix A.