

Executive summary

Chapter 2 - The public protection delivered by pharmacy regulation

General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) fitness to practise (FtP) determinations were examined from a 50-month period between 2012 and 2016. It was found that 80% of hearings involved pharmacists and just 20% involved pharmacy technicians – in the context that there are approximately twice as many pharmacists on the register as pharmacy technicians. The research shows that 73% of pharmacy technicians invited to a FtP hearing did not attend (22% of pharmacists did not attend their FtP hearings).

Between 53% to 67.4% of pharmacy technicians work in community pharmacy (see Appendix B). However, of those pharmacy technicians invited to a FtP hearing, 23% worked in community pharmacy (87% of pharmacists called to an FtP hearing worked in community pharmacy).

Quotes from fitness to practise determinations from 2013 to 2016 are cited, where pharmacy technicians have disengaged from the FtP process. The lack of attendance could be a factor which challenges the premise that pharmacy technicians can be considered, as a group, to be professionals.

The salaries of pharmacy technicians were found to be lower, particularly in community pharmacy, than those of other healthcare technicians. For a large proportion of pharmacy technicians in community pharmacy, their salaries were around or less than the UK Living Wage and were comparable to those of general customer service occupations such as retail cashier, checkout operator and travel agent. [1] [2]

The findings in relation to pharmacy technician salaries and fitness to practice cases lead to a notable conclusion: that the GPhC cannot attain sufficient regulatory traction through the regulation of pharmacy technicians in the current circumstances. The consequences for pharmacy technicians of removal from the register are very limited. The ultimate sanction of being 'struck off' provides limited protection to the public if there is little or no loss of income or status – particularly for those with lower salaries as found in community pharmacy, since they can easily find alternative work with the same level of pay or better, and without the same responsibilities to patients.

The report recommends the creation of a structured career framework for pharmacists, and subsequently for pharmacy technicians to support the roles of pharmacists, linked to pay banding at a significantly higher level than is currently the case in community pharmacy. It also recommends that the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (PSNI), which does not currently regulate pharmacy technicians but is considering doing so in the future, should consider the timing of its decision in the context of the issues detailed in this report and whether such regulation is likely to be effective given the current conditions which prevail in community pharmacy.

References

- [1] "Best paid jobs 2015: Compare your salary to the national average in this league table of 350 professions - and see the year's winners and losers," 27 November 2015. [Online]. Available: <http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/news/article-3334946/Best-paid-jobs-2015-Compare-pay-UK-average-350-professions.html>.
- [2] Office of National Statistics, "Region by Occupation (4 digit SOC) - Annual Pay Gross 2016 - ASHE: Table 15.7a," 26 October 2016. [Online]. Available: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/regionbyoccupation4digitsoc2010ashtable15>.