

Chapter 7 - Aligning the interests of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians

In order to develop successful skill mix, the interests of pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and patients must be aligned. This was achieved successfully in the hospital pharmacy sector in the 1980s, where the sector's leadership first identified what the future roles of pharmacists should be and developed a structured career framework and associated skills and salary escalator to support it. This secured the engagement and buy-in of pharmacists and led to more professionally-fulfilling roles which made better use of pharmacists' skills as experts in medicines, to the clear – and intended – benefit of the public. During the development process, the roles of pharmacy technicians were identified which could support those of pharmacists and enable pharmacists to spend more time on wards with patients, whereas previously their roles had been confined to a much greater extent to the dispensary. The relevant lessons from this development process should be applied to community pharmacy.

In contrast, the government's approach to community pharmacy has to a large extent involved developing policy through a small and exclusive Rebalancing Medicines Legislation and Pharmacy Regulation programme board – the members of which are hand-picked by the civil service and which excludes any significant representation of coalface pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. There is no professionally-led plan, developed in detail and through the engagement with coalface practitioners, which sees community pharmacists developing a structured career framework linked to a skills and salary escalator. No hierarchy has been created of new and professionally-rewarding roles for pharmacists delivered in the community pharmacy. No discernible, unifying, strategic vision for the future of community pharmacy has been determined. The rebalancing board's proposals to allow pharmacy technicians to supervise the sale and supply of medicines and pharmacy staff, including in the absence of a pharmacist, could see pharmacists taken away from patients – who are present in their greatest numbers in the community pharmacy.

Circumstances must be created in which pharmacists can place trust and confidence in the capabilities of pharmacy technicians to take on more advanced roles, but there are few, if any signs that this will be achieved in the near future if the government's current approach persists.