



PDA 2021 Safer Pharmacies Survey

| representing **your** interests |

| defending **your** reputation |

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Introduction

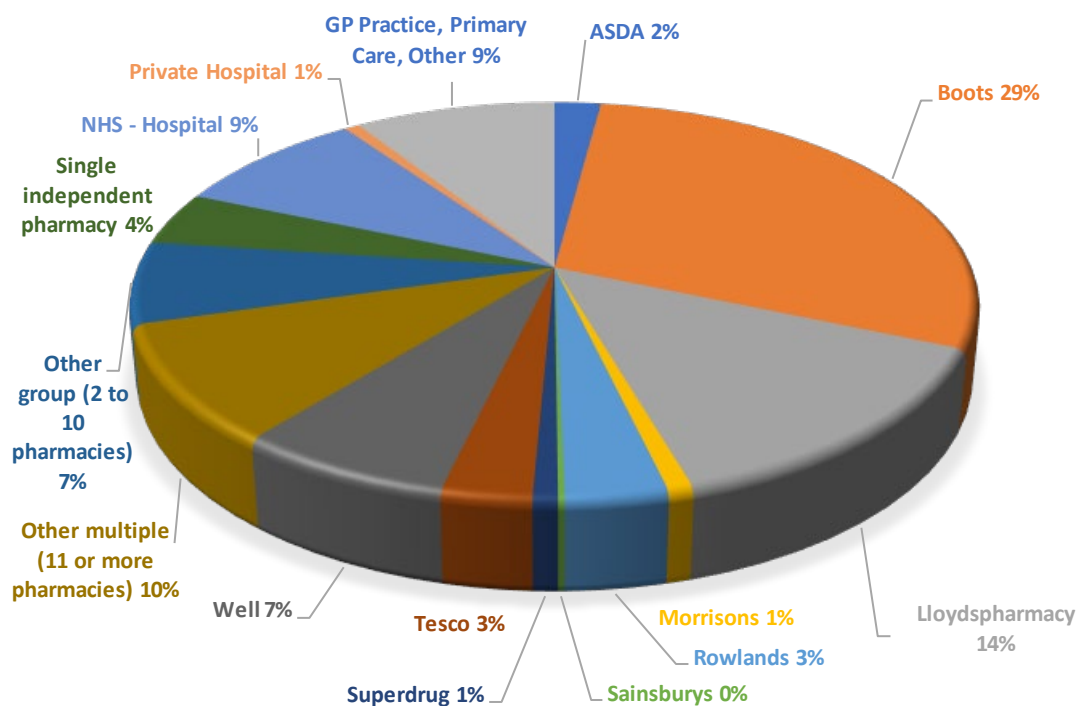
Once again, the Safer Pharmacies survey has thrown into the spotlight the working conditions faced by pharmacists. Feedback from members was instrumental in the development of the Safer Pharmacies Charter in 2017 and, since the charter was launched, the PDA surveys have monitored safety against the charter standards.

2021 has seen an almost universal worsening in working conditions in pharmacies.

Following on from three consecutive years of improvement, members reported:

- Being obliged to self-check much more frequently during shifts
- A massive drop in safe staffing levels, with over 97% working with unsafe staff levels at least some of the time
- Access to a pharmacist was lower than in previous years- most likely due to overstretched pharmacy teams having to multitask with vaccinations and consulting on minor ailments, meaning patients had to wait longer to be seen
- After improving from 2018 to 2020, the same levels of inadequate rest breaks as in 2019 were seen
- A worsening in levels of respect for professional judgement, lower support when raising concerns and much lower levels of physical safety, in comparison to last year's survey

1337 responses were received in total from across the sector as can be seen in the infograph below:



No Self-checking

Where pharmacists are directly involved in dispensing, or other processes requiring a high degree of accuracy, a suitably trained and competent member of staff will be always readily available in the pharmacy to provide an independent accuracy check.

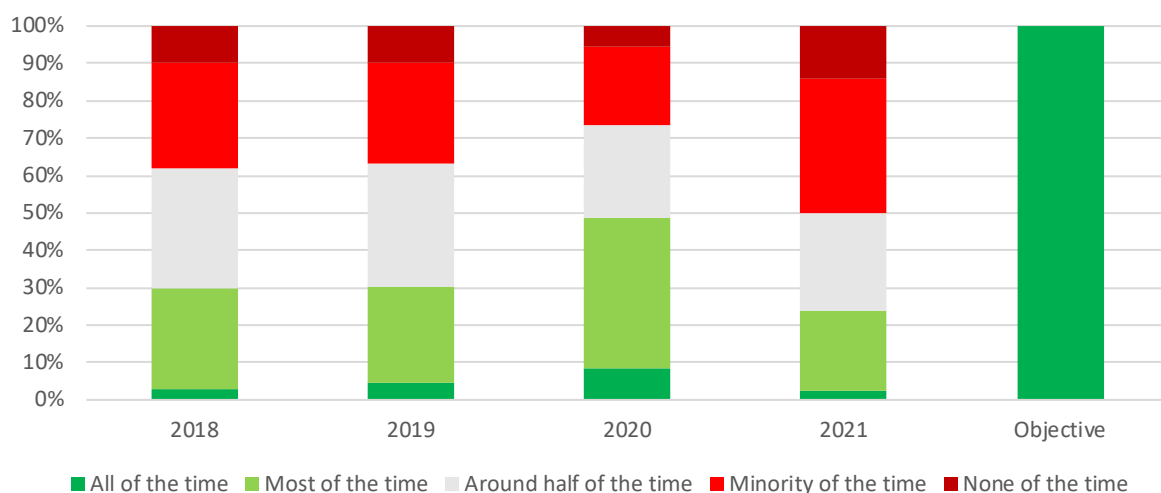
An independent second check improves patient safety by preventing errors.



Safe staffing

Staffing levels will be sufficient to allow all legal, contractual, and regulatory obligations to be met; to meet the workload involved in following standard operating procedures and to carry out other work in accordance with the organisation's expectations. All staff must be suitably trained and competent to carry out the pharmacy work they are involved in.

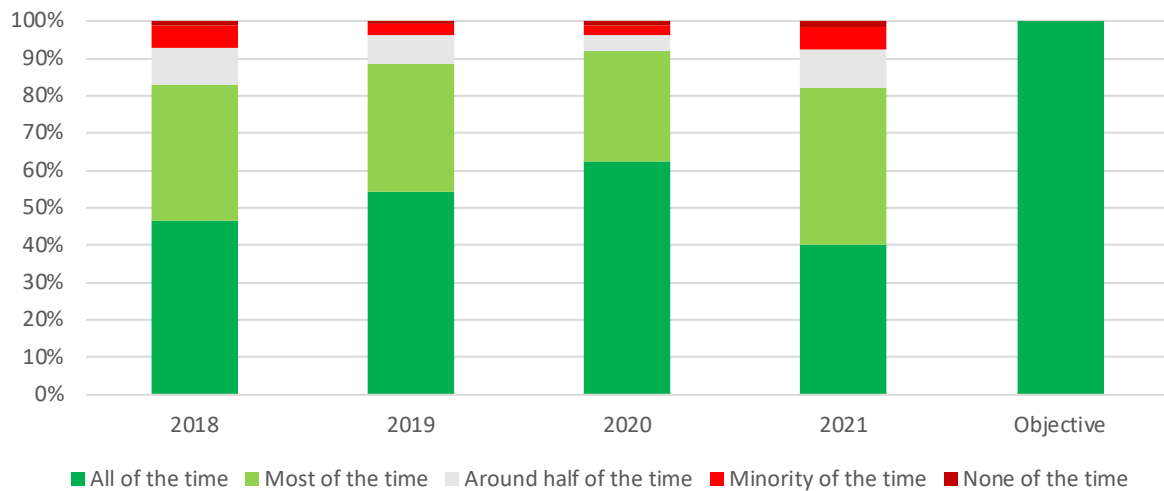
Providing enough suitably trained staff improves patient safety, quality of care and service.



Access to a pharmacist

A pharmacist is traditionally one of the few healthcare professionals accessible to patients without an appointment. A pharmacist must be available wherever patients expect immediate access to face-to-face expert advice on any medicines-related matters. The pharmacy owner or employer will meet this expectation by ensuring a pharmacist is available to patients and present in the pharmacy throughout its hours of operation.

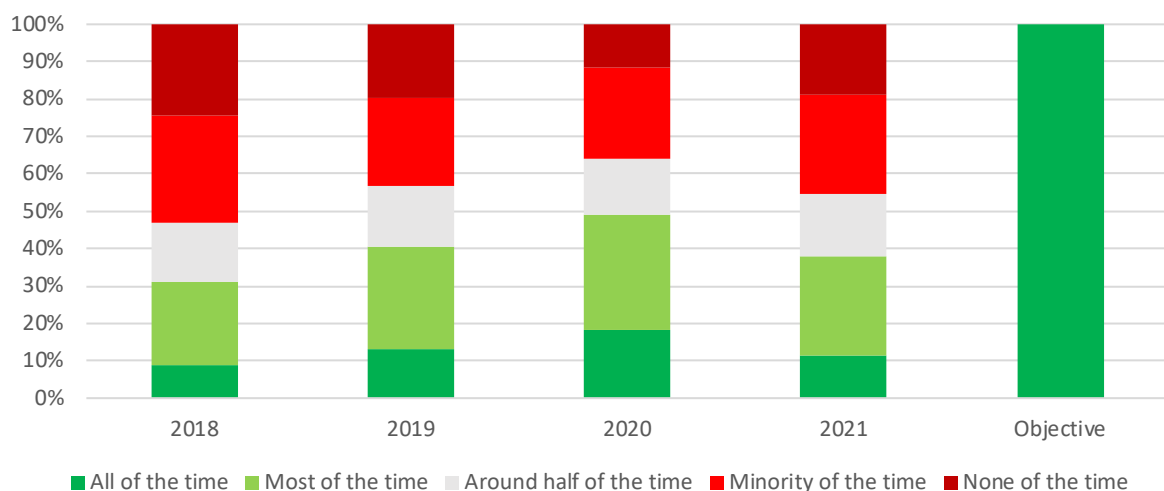
Pharmacists are the experts in medicines and must be present to ensure that medicines provided to patients are safe and appropriate.



Adequate rest

Pharmacists must be able to take at least their statutory and contractual breaks and rest periods, and additional breaks as required to meet their professional obligations. Pharmacists will be enabled to take these without interruption and will not be placed under any direct or indirect pressure to forfeit.

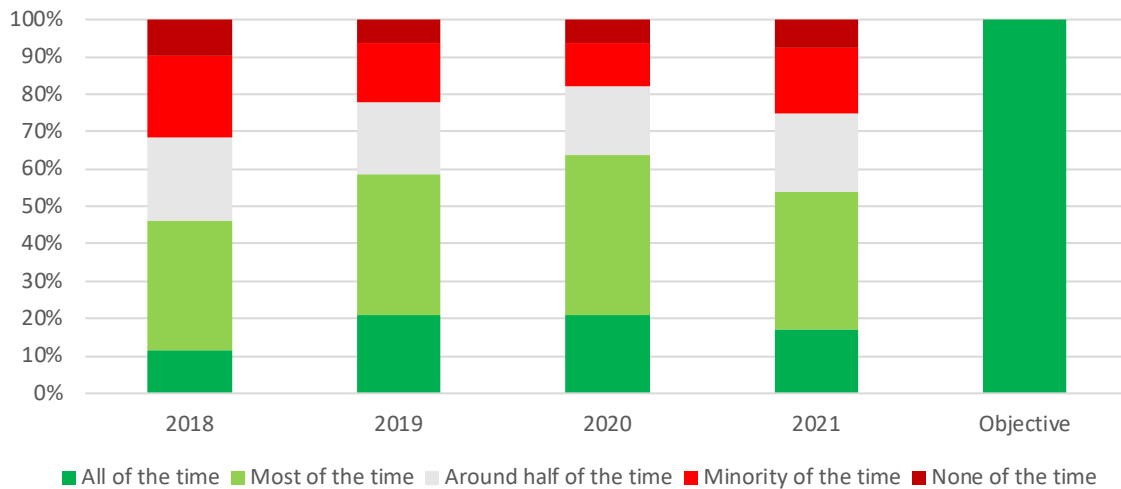
To keep patients safe, pharmacists must be alert and suitably rested at work.



Respect for professional judgement

Pharmacists will be enabled and encouraged to exercise professional decision-making in the workplace, so that patient safety and professional standards can be placed above any commercial or other operational considerations. Organisational and other targets must not inhibit professional autonomy.

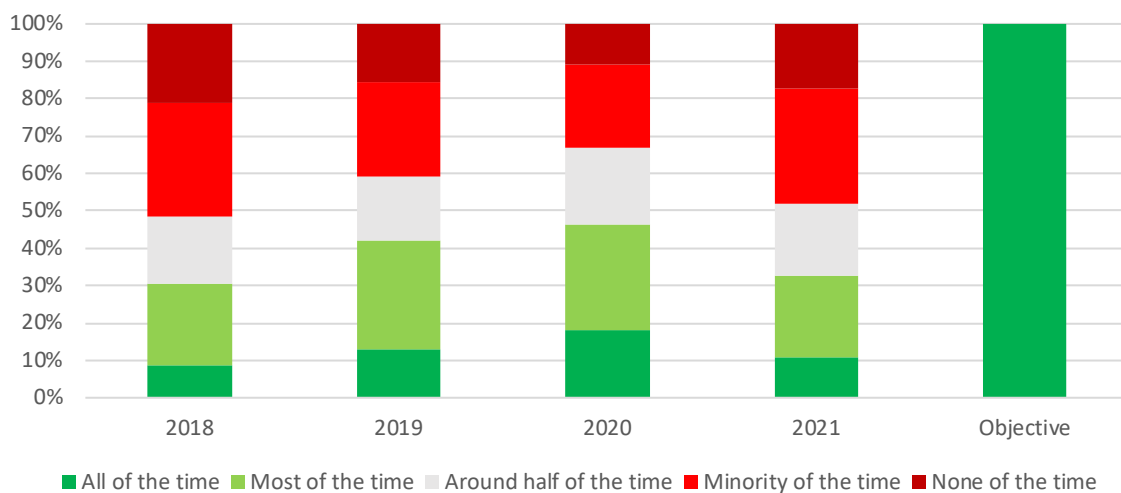
As health professionals, pharmacists put patients' health first.



Raising concerns

Pharmacists will be able to raise concerns without reprisal or fear. This will be facilitated by a supportive, open and receptive organisational culture. Issues identified will be promptly addressed and robust and enduring solutions implemented without delay.

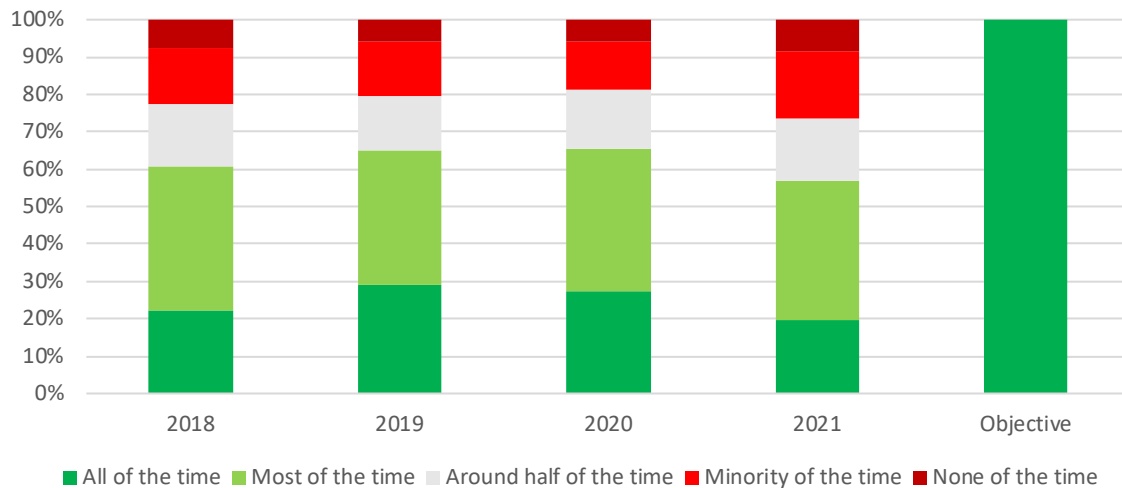
Concerns at work which could impact on patient safety need to be raised and resolved without delay.



Physically safe

Pharmacists will not have to work in the pharmacy alone and will have access to the necessary support at all times to perform their roles. Risks will be assessed, and preventive measures put in place so that patients and staff are safe – and can feel safe. A zero-tolerance approach will be taken to violence or abuse of pharmacists and other pharmacy staff.

Pharmacies need to be safe places for patients, pharmacists and everyone.



Conclusion

This year has seen a marked decline in conditions across the board in pharmacies. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic last year kick started a worsening in conditions faced by teams across the country and we would implore members to familiarise themselves with the contents of the safer pharmacies charter and encourage owners and senior managers to [sign up to the charter](#) to demonstrate their commitment to improving the safety of their patients and colleagues in the workplace.

At the PDA we have experienced a surge in cases of violence and aggression against pharmacy teams, increased workplace stresses and errors resulting from poor staffing levels, amongst many other contributory factors.

Since closing the survey, pharmacy teams across the country reported yet further incidences of threatening and violent behaviour due to intimidation by anti-vax protesters and a lack of provision of the Covid-19 rapid lateral flow tests coupled with the misconception about the meaning of the 16-digit “collect code” which they received when they order a test online. We have highlighted these issues to the NHS and other stakeholders and call upon employers to take proactive steps to protect pharmacy teams across the country.