



**Shilpa Patel**

The PDA has offered candidates of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) National Board Elections 2024 in England and Wales the opportunity to tell PDA members their views on key issues. Below is Shilpa Patel's response:

**1. What would you hope to achieve over the course of your office, if elected?**

My primary focus will be to campaign for community pharmacists to feel respected and valued, with an improved work-life balance. One approach would be to release pharmacists to provide clinical services while allowing pharmacy technicians to handle dispensing roles. Moreover, I would advocate for the use of digital technology to help streamline processes.

Secondly, I aim to improve communication by enhancing links between community pharmacies and within pharmacy sectors and the relevant government bodies. By providing advanced, structured, and relevant information pharmacies can prepare for changes appropriately and resolve issues seamlessly.

Thirdly, I will advocate for more pharmacists to become partners in general practice by providing essential resources, mentoring, and information on evolving roles and opportunities and I believe that prescribing is a vital aspect of our profession's future and a solution to ensuring pharmacists feel valued, respected, and maintain a healthy work-life balance.

**2. The RPS ceased to be the regulator over a decade ago and therefore membership became optional. It has refused to publicly declare its membership numbers for several years, even when asked to do so at its own annual meetings. The membership figure of "26,137 paying members" was given in the RPS Annual report 2022 and this is a rare insight for members. What is your view on transparency and in particular the declaration of membership numbers in future?**

Transparency and accountability are vital for RPS as a measure of how well they are representing pharmacists and their needs. As a candidate, I believe that the RPS should publicly disclose its membership numbers as it is so important to understand the strength and engagement of the pharmacy profession.

When asking for nominations, I discovered that many pharmacist colleagues were not RPS members, with only 39% of 421 respondents being members. Non-members cited reasons such as not gaining benefits, preferring printed journals, and feeling unheard due to disappointing working conditions, the current state of pharmacy, and price.

A strong body is needed to represent pharmacists and to persuade the government to make changes. We can increase membership by being more present in the media, introducing ambassadors in various sectors, showcasing membership benefits to non-members, and investigating what members want from the RPS to increase benefits to meet their needs.

### **3. Should the RPS membership base remain exclusively for pharmacists, pharmaceutical scientists, and pharmacy students/trainee pharmacists? Why?**

As a candidate, while I support the RPS membership base remaining exclusive to pharmacists, pharmaceutical scientists, and pharmacy students/trainee pharmacists, I believe that the society should also explore the benefits of opening up membership to pharmacy technicians. This is because pharmacy technicians are becoming an increasingly crucial and important component of the pharmacy workforce and their contributions should be acknowledged.

Inclusion of pharmacy technicians in our vision will enable us to incorporate them into work plans and allow pharmacists to focus on using their clinical skills and knowledge to their fullest capacity. There is strength in numbers, and I believe that by opening up membership to pharmacy technicians, we can create a more united and effective advocacy body for the pharmacy profession.

### **4. Pharmacy technicians undoubtedly have an important role to play in supporting pharmacists through skill mix. However, the government seems keen instead to introduce pharmacist role substitution for example by giving pharmacy technicians' the rights to operate Patient Group Directions (PGDs). What views do you hold on this subject and in particular, do you believe the pharmacy technicians have the appropriate levels of training to independently deliver PGDs?**

I hold the view that pharmacy technicians do not currently have the appropriate level of training to independently deliver PGDs. There needs to be a clear separation of roles, and pharmacists must remain responsible for the clinical aspects of prescribing.

I do believe that pharmacy technicians have a critical role to play in supporting pharmacists and their contributions to the pharmacy workforce should be recognised. However, the government seems to be keen on introducing pharmacist role substitution by allowing pharmacy technicians to operate PGDs.

There is a lack of clarity regarding the permissible duties of pharmacy technicians. The new programme was disclosed to the public prior to being shared with stakeholders, resulting in further ambiguity. It is critical to ensure the PGDs are being implemented safely and effectively. There must be appropriate training and supervision for pharmacy technicians to ensure that they can operate within the prescribed protocols.

### **5. Do you support the PDA's Safer Pharmacies Charter?**

As a candidate from Norway, I grew up in a culture that prioritises work-life balance, valuing employees' well-being and safety in the workplace. In Norway, a positive working environment is essential for the overall well-being of employees and the development of the workforce. In the UK, pharmacists often work long hours and under high workload pressures, leading to burnout and mental health issues.

I support the PDA's Safer Pharmacies Charter, which acknowledges the importance of promoting a positive work environment for pharmacists. The charter promotes key principles such as safe staffing levels, reduced workload pressures, workplace safety checks, professional indemnity insurance, equal employment opportunities, and protected professional development time.

Implementing these principles will enable pharmacists to improve their work-life balance and deliver high-quality pharmaceutical care, ensuring both patient and employee satisfaction.

I will bring my knowledge and experience of a culture that priorities work-life balance to the table.

**6. What are your views on the UK Pharmacy Professional Leadership Advisory Board installed by the 4 country Chief Pharmaceutical Officers?**

I support the approach, as it signals a commitment to addressing common issues affecting the pharmacy sector across the UK and focuses on promoting leadership development and training, hopefully leading to the cultivation of future pharmacy leaders. I am an advocate for the opportunity to establish greater unity across sectors within the pharmacy profession and it provides a platform for developing new approaches and solutions to tackle persistent challenges such as workforce planning, medicines optimisation, and access to services.

However, creating and maintaining such a board might mean taking up resources that could have sponsored other crucial services and accountability and political interference could threaten the board's efficiency and diminish the industry's confidence in it.

I believe the advisory board represents an innovative and creative concept which aligns with my visions and values and it will strengthen the voice of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society.