



British Society for the  
History of Pharmacy

## The evolution of pharmacy Theme B, Level 2 History of the Pharmaceutical Society



Royal  
Pharmaceutical  
Society  
of Great Britain

### Membership of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain is the regulatory and professional body for pharmacists in the United Kingdom. It was founded in 1841.

The relationship between training and practising as a pharmacist, and becoming a member of the Pharmaceutical Society has changed over time. This is as a result of:

- the changing role of the Society
- pharmacy-related legislation, and
- the changing nature of the pharmacist's role.

#### **Before the founding of the Pharmaceutical Society:**

Anyone could work as a **chemist**, **druggist** or **pharmacist**. 'Chemists and druggists' existed as a distinct group in the medical profession, but did not have to register themselves with any organisation.

#### **After the founding of the Pharmaceutical Society, 1841:**

The most important factor for an aspiring member of the new Pharmaceutical Society, was to own a business. Even if a pharmacist had passed the Society's Major exam, he could only join if he was also a proprietor. Pharmacists who were not eligible to be members were called associates. Membership conferred various privileges, including standing as a candidate for and voting in the Society's Council elections.

The Pharmacy Act of 1852 introduced the first statutory Register. This unpublished listing included those who were already members of the Society before 1852, unexamined proprietors who had accepted the last opportunity to become members without qualifying, and those who had passed the major examination.

#### **After the Pharmacy Act, 1868:**

All pharmacists had to register with the Society in order to dispense scheduled poisons. They had to pass one of the Society's exams, either the minor to become Chemists and Druggists or the major to become Pharmaceutical Chemists.

The Act also put measures in place to register:

- employees who had qualified before 1868
- those who had been in business on their own account before 1 August 1868
- pharmacy assistants who had been working for three years or more prior to 1868.



You still had to own a business to become a member. Employees could only join as associates.

The 1868 Pharmacy Act also introduced two new types of membership:

- all Chemists and Druggists in business prior to 1868 were eligible for membership.
- all those who passed the minor exam after 1868, and subsequently became proprietors of a business, could become 'associates in business',



a membership status barring them from standing for election to the Society's Council.

In 1872, all Pharmaceutical Chemists were required to become members.

**After the Pharmacy Amendments Act, 1898:**

Chemists and Druggists who had qualified since 1868 could become members for the first time. This eliminated the categories of associate and 'associate in business.'

**After the Pharmacy and Poisons Act, 1933:**

Membership became compulsory for Chemists and Druggists. From this point on, registering with the Society and being a member of the Society was the same thing.

**After the Pharmacy Act, 1953:**

From 1954, all pharmacists became known as 'Pharmaceutical Chemists.' Those registered as Chemists and Druggists were transferred onto the Register as Member of the Pharmaceutical Society (M.P.S.). Those had formerly been on the Register of Pharmaceutical Chemists were now Fellows of the Pharmaceutical Society (F.P.S.).

**Practising and non-practising**

In 2004, membership of the Society was reduced from 5 categories (full-time, part-time, overseas, not working due to ill-health and aged over 60 years) to 2 categories – practising and non-practising.

A practising pharmacist was defined as a member who undertakes any work in, or gives advice in relation to, the science of medicines or the practice of pharmacy or health care. They now have to undertake compulsory Continual Professional Development to maintain their membership.

**Overseas pharmacists**

Pharmacists from other countries became honorary members from the Society's foundation. Until 2006, there was reciprocal registration of pharmacists from Northern Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Today, overseas pharmacists can apply to become Society members. The procedures they have to follow depend on the country where they originally qualified.

**Pharmacy technicians**

Membership of the Society has now widened to include pharmacy technicians. The Society has operated a voluntary register for pharmacy technicians since January 1<sup>st</sup> 2005. It is currently seeking statutory powers to make registration compulsory.

**FIND OUT MORE**

**Links to other sheets:**

Theme A: The development of the profession, sheet 1

**Further reading:**

Holloway, S W F, *The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain: A political and social history, 1841-1991*, (Pharmaceutical Press, London, 1991)

**Other resources:**

Museum of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society Information Sheet: *Tracing people and premises in pharmacy*