



An Open Letter from the President to all Members



Dear Colleague

Dealing with workplace pressures - Delivering quality services for patients

As President of your Society, I am pleased to announce today that I am launching a major initiative to understand and address the issue of workplace pressures within the profession.

The new professional leadership body for pharmacy will be determined to listen to its members, and to support them in delivering high quality professional services for their patients.

As we move towards the establishment of this new organisation, the Society is changing. We have been actively listening to what you have to say – we have listened as never before – through the Clarke Inquiry; through TransCom; through targeted market research; through membership surveys; through countless face-to-face meetings. You have told us, and we have heard loud and clear, of your aspirations and concerns for pharmacy and pharmacists. It is important that this dialogue continues, and that members and the Society re-engage.

Alongside the huge sense of pride in our profession, and the desire to provide the quality of service rightly expected of a highly valued healthcare professional, many have spoken of the workplace pressures that pharmacists face, and the lack of support to deal with these pressures. Over the past 5 years the role for pharmacists has become more clinically focused. Prescription numbers have risen by nearly 30%, Medicines Use Reviews (MURs) and the Scottish NHS Minor Ailment Service have been introduced, and pharmacists are enthusiastically striving to take on the extended and enhanced roles for which they are ideally placed. I believe that we need to reflect upon the way in which we work, and the way in which we are supported in the workplace.

A professional body has a responsibility both to its members and to the public, and it should be prepared to address issues which adversely affect both of these groups. It is simply not acceptable, or safe, for pharmacists to work without appropriate support, or without the ability to take rest breaks.

Recent research commissioned by the Society reflects what many of you have told us. It reports that the levels of stress in the profession are “extremely high”, and related to “high levels of work overload, and working long hours”.

This directly affects pharmacists, their colleagues, their families and their patients. The effects of stress on health are well-known – it can trigger depression or lead to physical symptoms. It is also a major cause of sickness-related absence from work, which in turn impacts on employers’ productivity. And, importantly, work overload can affect the quality of the service we deliver to our patients, and give rise to concerns of risk to patient safety.

We will be sharing with the Superintendents and senior pharmacists within the major employers the findings of our research and feedback from pharmacists. We will discuss with them how the Society can support and work with them to examine the impact of, and resolve the factors leading to, inappropriate workplace pressures.

As a key part of this initiative, the Society will host a series of high profile seminars to bring together employers, employee associations, trade bodies, unions, researchers and individual pharmacists to look for a collective solution to the problem of pressures and workload in the pharmacy workplace. The outputs from these seminars will be widely shared, and will form the basis for best professional practice guidance and resources for employers and employees. We are here to support pharmacists to offer the best possible level of service to their patients, and this guidance will provide you with a valued, and long overdue, source of support.

Pharmacists need to feel confident in delegating tasks to others trained to support them – this is not always the case, and is a source of pressure for some - and for patients it is important to have confidence in the advice they receive in pharmacies. We are also committing to deliver a number of initiatives to address these concerns.

As these and other initiatives are undertaken and the outcomes delivered, we will continue to identify additional activity to help pharmacists. But we cannot achieve change on our own. I am interested to hear your views on this initiative, and in particular of your experiences of managing your workload pressures – have you found ways of working that help you better manage your workload or relieve stress? I want to hear from you, and to engage the whole profession in solving this problem.

I started this letter by saying that the new professional leadership body for pharmacy will be determined to listen to its members, and to support them in delivering high quality professional services for their patients and colleagues.

Well, I believe that we shouldn't wait for a new professional body to do this – the current Society has a responsibility to do this, and this initiative demonstrates my resolve, alongside all of those who work on your behalf, to make a tangible and lasting difference to your professional lives and the lives of your patients.

I am also keen to identify other areas where you feel the Society, and the new professional body which follows, should take a lead in supporting you and the profession. I am listening – so please email me at support-for-you@rpsgb.org to let me know how best you think we can help you improve the quality of your professional life and the quality of your professional service to your patients. Your commitment to your profession and your patients is what we are here to support – and you have my personal assurance that we will do so.


Steve Charlton
President, RPSGB

