

MSP Briefing – Scottish Government Debate: Drugs Strategy, ‘The Road to Recovery’ 04 June 2008



Summary:

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB) welcomes the Government's new drugs strategy 'The Road to Recovery' as a major step forward in improving Scotland's health and well-being.

The RPSGB:

- urge the Government to involve pharmacy in every stage of planning, commissioning and delivering services in order to maximise the contribution that this profession can make to every individual's recovery.
- believe it's essential that pharmacists are included in the new Drug Recovery Network as they are the most accessible of health professionals with local, walk-in access to a wide range of services and have daily contact with drug users and their families.
- call for pharmacists to be enabled to adjust doses of substitute medication so they can contribute significantly to successful reduction programmes and rehabilitation.
- call for recognition of the pharmacist as a key partner in consulting patients on their needs, signposting people to specialist support and giving advice on prevention of drugs misuse.

RPSGB view on the Drugs Strategy, ‘The Road to Recovery’

The Society welcomes the Government's announcement of its new drugs strategy the 'Road to Recovery' as a major step forward in improving Scotland's health and well-being and is delighted that the pharmacist's role is recognised.

The Society agrees with the Government that the effective prevention of drug use should be the gold standard and the preferred approach. However in reality effective treatment of established drug problems is also necessary. There is scope for current treatment programs to be improved. Pharmacists are experts in the use of drugs and can increase drug safety. Many have specialist knowledge in the field of substance misuse which should be fully utilised to maximise resources and capacity within the healthcare system.

In support of the Government's vision for services to be integrated and available locally, we urge the Government to involve pharmacy in every stage of planning, commissioning and delivering services in order to maximise the contribution that this profession can make to every individual's recovery.

How pharmacy contributes to current drug treatment in Scotland

Over 80% of all pharmacies in Scotland dispense drugs for the treatment of drug misuse and 12.5% of pharmacies provide a needle exchange service. Currently over 17,000 drug users are estimated to be dispensed methadone through community pharmacies. The majority of these drug users visit their pharmacy every day and 57% have their self administration of methadone supervised by the pharmacist on a daily basis. (Matheson et al, 2006) From this data it is clear drug users have more contact with pharmacists than any other professional group. (1)

The role of pharmacy in drug treatment and 'The Road to Recovery'

- It is essential that pharmacists are included in the new Drug Recovery Network.
- Pharmacists are the most accessible of health professionals with local, walk-in access to a wide range of services. Pharmacists have daily contact with drug users and their families and this should be used to advantage in the recovery process. They can also contribute to prevention initiatives through general advice provision, and schools and young people liaison.
- As pharmacists see many drug users daily to supervise their consumption of substitute medication, they are well placed to judge drug user's progress and revisit their goals of treatment. Enabling pharmacists to adjust doses of substitute medication would utilize this relationship and contribute significantly to successful reduction programmes and rehabilitation.
- Community pharmacy-based needle exchange schemes provide the pharmacist with an initial point of contact for drug users and participation in these schemes can be the first milestone on the road to recovery.
- The pharmacist is an important source of information for drug users, providing information and support on wound management (of injection sites), reducing the transmission of infection including blood borne viruses, safer sex, minor ailments and most importantly on the recovery path, the pharmacist can act as a gateway into both drug treatment and social services by advising on how and where to get help.
- There are many examples of integrated care and successful local initiatives with a multi- disciplinary approach. e.g. Glasgow Addiction Services where pharmacists can directly refer drug users to appropriate medical and social services. It is important that success and best practice is shared and we have consistency throughout the country.
- Community pharmacies are accessible locally, no appointments are necessary and their extended opening hours ensure flexibility of treatment plans facilitating return to work, training and/or education.

- Pharmacist's expertise in medicines and daily contact with drug users ensures that the pharmacist is well-positioned to recognise "at risk" individuals, provide overdose prevention advice, and to reinforce relapse prevention strategies. They can also identify wider issues around child protection and other family issues which may need specialist support.
- Community pharmacists are the first and most frequent contact for drug users and their families, and as such, have the potential for early intervention. It is vital that the pharmacy profession is included in any multi-disciplinary training advocated by the Government to provide consistency of approach, and it is essential that consideration be given to allocate resources appropriately to allow this.
- All service providers should work together to ensure continuity of care and successful individual care plans especially out-of-hours and for vulnerable groups such as mental health patients and discharged prisoners.
- Public Health Service is part of the community pharmacy contract. Drug information campaigns should utilise community pharmacies to target all age ranges with key messages regarding drug awareness and avoidance.

About the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society is the regulatory and professional body for Britain's pharmacists. It is the only organisation which represents the entire pharmacy profession.

For further information on any aspect of this briefing or on the work of The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain in Scotland please contact scotinfo@rpsgb.org

References

(1) Matheson C., Bond C.M., Tinellii M. (2006) Community pharmacy services for drug misusers: measuring National Service Delivery and Development over a Decade. Report to CSO of Scottish Executive, CZG/2/232.