

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Pharmacy

Tuesday 22nd February, 16:00-17:00

Empowering the Pharmacy Workforce: Recruitment, Retention and Professional Development

Speakers Panel

- Paul Mason – Superintendent at **Lo's Pharmacy**
- Mark Koziol – Chairman at the **Pharmacists' Defence Association**
- Malcolm Harrison – CEO at the **Company Chemists' Association**
- Alan Ryan – Director of National Transformational Programmes at **Health Education England**
- Anil Sharma – Practicing Pharmacist & East Anglia Regional Representative at **Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee**

Parliamentary Attendees

- Jackie Doyle-Price MP
- Dame Rosie Winterton MP
- Office of Feryal Clark MP
- Baroness Masham of Ilton
- Lord Lea
- Peter Dowd MP

Event Outline

Local pharmacies and pharmacy teams are an invaluable part of our national health service, as demonstrated by their significant contribution to the pandemic response. Our dedicated pharmacy teams, highly skilled, medically trained professionals went above and beyond to deliver the very best patient care, keeping pharmacies open, providing medicines, face-to-face health advice and vital vaccinations.

As the NHS faces unprecedented challenges, there is an opportunity to further harness the valuable skills within pharmacy and make sure the workforce is better supported and empowered to play an even bigger role in primary care.

This virtual event brought together parliamentarians and a panel of industry experts, to discuss the ways we can address key challenges for the pharmacy workforce, how best to support our pharmacy teams, and the wider healthcare system, now and in the future. As part of this, we looked at the size of the pharmacy workforce, their training and development, and how pharmacy teams can be better supported to improve staff retention.

Meeting Notes

Introduction from APPG Chair Jackie Doyle-Price MP

The Chair of the APPG, Jackie Doyle-Price MP began the meeting by setting out the session themes. In particular she highlighted the continued importance of the pharmacy sector to healthcare, and the need to “talk up pharmacy”. Notably this includes involving pharmacy in the discussion around the healthcare workforce.

Paul Mason – Superintendent of Lo’s Pharmacy

Paul Mason, Superintendent of Lo’s Pharmacy began by emphasising that there has been a fundamental shift in what pharmacists want and expect from their career, with a particular emphasis on being both varied and engaging whilst contributing to the clinical sector. He notes that there is also a desire by staff for the stimulation that face-to-face patient contact provides.

He continued by setting out a series of issues that he believes need addressing. These included mitigating or avoiding altogether the direct competition within primary care for attracting and retaining pharmacists. He notes that reduction in funding for community pharmacies is pushing many independent community pharmacy groups to the brink of unviability.

He also spoke of the significant pressure on the community pharmacy workforce. He acknowledged that whilst work is being done to upskill those who are coming into the sector, more work is needed to upskill those who are already in the sector and prepare individual pharmacists.

He also stressed that a long-term funding strategy needs to be devised and put into place so that pharmacies can see both a long and medium term future, as well as transition from solely focusing on medical supply to also delivering medical services.

He concluded that ultimately the more skilled the workforce, and the higher the quality of services that community pharmacies can offer will ultimately benefit patients and NHS services across the entirety of the primary care sector.

Mark Koziol – Chairman of the Pharmacists’ Defence Association

Mark Koziol, the Chairman of the Pharmacists’ Defence Association began by stressing the need to get the workforce issue right. He cited a report by the CAA in the Telegraph which reported a shortfall of approximately 3,000 pharmacists, however the report positively concluded that there 2002 there has been an increase in pharmacy schools (30 in 2022 compared to 17 in 2002). Noting that there are now 60,000 pharmacists registered, a total increase of 17,000.

He did however mention that whilst the number of pharmacists has increased, the number of community pharmacies has remained “static”.

Mark went on to raise the issues reported within the working environment by community pharmacists, many of whom noted increased pressures and working hours. He cited a survey which concluded that whilst 63% of staff did not consider there to be a shortage of pharmacists in pharmacy, 54% are reportedly looking to change their role.

He concluded by summarising general issues with pay and working conditions, a dramatically reduced staffing level, at the same time as increasing pressures brought on by the pandemic, and the need to ensure professional fulfilment amongst staff on all levels in community pharmacy.

Malcolm Harrison – CEO of the Company Chemists’ Association

Malcolm Harrison, CEO of the CCA began by briefly introducing the CAA, noting that they represent large owners and individual pharmacy operators, totalling approximately 5,500 pharmacies. He continued by stressing that he believes there can be no doubt that we are currently within a workforce crisis, and pharmacies across the country are struggling to recruit full time staff and locums.

He noted that there is more desire from graduates for more professional fulfilment and completing a clinical role. He explained that whilst generally more pharmacists are needed, the demand for their services is far greater, and given that there is a greater demand for flexible working, we now need more personnel to do the same amount of work.

He comments that there has been new funding for primary care and practices to recruit around 6000 new staff in both community pharmacy and hospitals, whilst the funding is welcome it does not amount to new pharmacists in the workforce. He notes that there is a shortfall of around 3,000 compared to 2017 and as locum rates are going up, ultimately demand outstrips supplies.

He cites that pharmacists stepped up throughout the pandemic and showed how critical and fundamental they are to the health of the nation, it now becomes a question of how to build on the success and capitalise on new opportunities. He notes that there is talk about increasing the clinical capabilities of the workforce, with the added benefit of taking on more roles from other stretched areas of the NHS to clear the pandemic induced backlog.

He also discussed reviewing the law that surrounds pharmacy practices, as the legislative framework pre-dates NHS, it must be updated to fit the needs of today, and allow for the commissioning of services provided by the NHS, to give the upskilled workforce the capability to remove pressures from the NHS.

He concludes that the flat funding model has impacted salaries and investments in staff and the larger workforce, and we need a robust plan on upskilling the workforce to meet the needs of all players in primary care to tackle post-pandemic challenges.

Alan Ryan - Director of National Transformational Programmes at HEE

Alan Ryan, Director at HEE began by introducing himself and his nursing background, as well as his current role as national director of transformational programmes. He comments that there are clearly challenges impacting pharmacy, however notes that it is an exciting time for the industry from an education perspective. He states that we have a once in a lifetime chance to make pharmacy a more attractive career for both graduates and non-graduates.

He explains that changing the Undergraduate pharmacy degree programme from a purely science based degree to a clinically based programme is advantageous and it can go beyond focusing solely on independent prescribing.

He echoed that the legislative changes Malcolm mentioned are very important, commenting that without them we won't be able to release pharmacists to take on extra responsibilities necessary to free up wider staff across primary care and the NHS.

Anil Sharma – Practicing Pharmacist & East Anglia Regional Representative at PSNC

Anil Sharma, a practicing community pharmacist and the East Anglia representative of the PSNC began by emphasising that for the past 12-18 months it had been virtually impossible for him to recruit new staff or locums, and many new graduates wanted to leave community pharmacy altogether. He largely attributes this to a lack of career opportunities in the field, and noted that there was between 6-9 pharmacy managers that he was directly aware of that had left to join PCNs.

He explained that he had tried everything on recruitment, and had never seen anything like this in 15 years, receiving only 3-5 applications over the past six months. He also stressed that in his view it was not working conditions that are the sole problem, but rather the work/life balance and a perceived lack of career opportunities.

Anil discussed how best to protect community pharmacists, and explored the variety of possible services that pharmacies are able to provide, yet with limited capacity to take up other services such as measuring/recording blood pressure. He explained that many of his staff were leaving to work in other professions altogether like supermarkets, stressing that these were qualified and accredited staff members.

He said he had to make the decision not to train staff, and recently was unable to attend family funeral because he had to keep the pharmacy open. He noted that he was falling out of love with the career that he chose.

Pharmacy closures, especially in rural areas, caused widespread consequences for those who rely the most on local pharmacies such as elderly people and mothers, he noted. Especially those who are less mobile and do not have access to public transport, Anil said.

He concludes that there is a disconnect between Government messaging which puts pharmacy first, and the needs of the workforce, we need a level playing field to tackle this unparalleled workforce crisis.

Discussion

Jackie Doyle-Price then opened up the session to questions and asked the panel generally what Parliamentarians can be doing to make sure that the NHS and DHSC view the pharmacy workforce as an integral part of the NHS.

Mark commented that there is a need to rewrite the entire system of primary and secondary care in order to see where the needs for pharmacy are.

Paul noted that the Community Pharmacist Consultation Service is an invaluable service that is often underused.

Jackie Doyle-Price then asked Anil as a practicing pharmacist who he expects to show leadership on this issue.

Anil emphasised that the issues facing the workforce are large and multifaceted, there is a need for an across the board increase in funding. He says that MPs need to speak to Ministers in the Treasury and DHSC, highlighting the benefits that pharmacies have delivered consistently over the last 15 years, and the last two years especially.

Jackie Doyle-Price comments that as a group the APPG has made the case for funding, but rather we now need to be more specific with asks and outputs moving forward.

Jackie Doyle-Price stated that ultimately to ensure success we need to structure the debate on funding around the outcomes that we want to achieve.

Mark comments that pharmaceutical care should be the starting point for any discussion.

Alan stated that the correlation between happiness at work and the investment in education and work should also be stressed.

Anil explains that currently community pharmacists have the capability to do significantly more, but they simply do not have the workforce capacity to do it.

Summarising Remarks

Jackie Doyle-Price concluded that ultimately we need to have a fully comprehensive plan and guide to push forward the messaging/aims for.

Malcom emphasised that the legislative framework is the key and reform is crucial.

Mark discussed the need to find common ground, and prevent people from leaving the profession in such high numbers.

The meeting was then concluded.