



Association of
Pharmacy
Technicians UK

The Case For Pharmacy Technician Membership of The Royal College of Pharmacy

Introduction

The publication of 'Trust, Assurance and Safety – The Regulation of Health Professionals in the 21st Century' has led to a rapid and widespread debate over professional leadership for the pharmacy profession. The recommendation in the paper that professional leadership is provided by an organisation akin to a royal college seems certain to become a reality. However, the shape and membership of this organisation is still extremely fluid.

Aim

The aim of this short paper is to set out the case for taking an inclusive approach to ensure that Pharmacy Technicians are offered the opportunity to become members of any future royal college of pharmacy.

Membership Categories

The structure and functions of any future royal college are not yet clear and membership categories will need to be developed. APTUK recognises and agrees the need to differentiate between member groups should pharmacy technicians be admitted. It will also be important for patients, the public and other healthcare professionals to easily recognise groups with different professional qualifications. APTUK believes that it is possible to build this distinction into the model for a royal college.

Workforce Development

The pharmacy profession has, for quite some time, been working towards maximising the full output potential of the various grades of pharmacy staff whilst, at the same time, protecting the public. In particular extended roles for pharmacy technicians have been introduced, partly to release time for pharmacists to utilise their knowledge and experience more effectively. This has most recently been highlighted by the Prime Minister in releasing '*Building on Progress*' on 19 Mar 2007 (<http://www.rpsgb.org/pdfs/pr070319.pdf>); this is also helping the government realize targets set out in their modernisation programme. Pharmacy technicians are fundamental to the success of this strategy; moreover, they are working at a higher level than ever before. The skill mix agenda is strongly supported by documents such as 'A Spoonful of Sugar', 'Making Better Use of the Pharmacy Workforce' and 'Our Health, Our Care, Our Say'. These changes in role demand strong professional leadership which is absolutely essential to protect not just pharmacy technicians and the patient but also pharmacists!

Revalidation

The white paper makes it clear that one of the major roles of a royal college will be revalidation. Since pharmacy technicians will be registered through the General Pharmaceutical Council in exactly the same way as pharmacists, a vehicle for revalidation for both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians will be required. Registration will bring mandatory CPD for pharmacy technicians, who are currently utilising exactly the same system and paperwork as pharmacists for their CPD. It would be valuable to pool resources and

provide a consistent approach to CPD across the profession. It is entirely logical that pharmacy technicians should revalidate through a royal college and must be members of that college.

Partnership Working

Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians have been working side by side for a very long time. For the most part, both groups of staff fully understand each other's knowledge and experience allowing them both to gain maximum benefit from the relationship. The inclusion of both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians within a single royal college can only strengthen this relationship. The two groups of staff working together in a unified way would bring huge benefits in sharing development strategies in every area; it would also provide a consistent approach to post-qualification education and training standards for specialist roles. The profession could also be truly said to be speaking with a united voice. Such an approach must surely improve the service we all deliver to patients as well as providing greater protection for them.

Financial and Resources

The ability of any organisation to deliver quality support to its members is always constrained by funding and resources. There are around 13,000 pharmacy technicians in UK who will within the next few years all become registered. This is a substantial number of people whose membership fees would greatly enhance the ability of a royal college to deliver high quality professional leadership.

Strength in Numbers

Pharmacy has for some time suffered from having many small specialist groups working independently; this has often resulted in a very fragmented approach, for example, when responding to government consultations. A large royal college working on behalf of its members will have a much greater voice than a small royal college. Under these circumstances, an additional 13,000 pharmacy technician members seems very attractive and will also ensure that the college is truly representative of the profession.

Conclusion

Five areas of benefit have been highlighted in this short paper; workforce development, revalidation, partnership working, financial/resources and strength in numbers. Each section contains reasoned arguments for taking an inclusive approach when forming a future royal college of pharmacy. The national officers of the Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK (APTUK) have concluded, from these reasoned arguments, that there is a strong case for including pharmacy technicians within the membership of any future royal college of pharmacy. This approach has already been recognised through the meeting convened by the College of Pharmacy Practice and endorsed in the 'Waterloo Agreement'.

Proposal

It is proposed that careful consideration be given to the inclusion of pharmacy technicians in any future Royal College

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