Pharmacy must improve political tactics, says Alan Milburn

EXCLUSIVE C+D CONFERENCE Former health secretary urges pharmacy to speak confidently

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The ability of community pharmacy bodies to present a unified and confident message to government has been slammed by former health secretary Alan Milburn.

Speaking at the C+D Conference at the Pharmacy Show this week, Mr Milburn warned improving this, and starting to lobby more successfully, was vital to ensure the sector’s survival in the changing NHS.

But PSNC refuted the claims that pharmacy bodies were not presenting a unified message to politicians, saying they made “absolutely sure” messages were co-ordinated before meetings.

Commenting on the government’s health white paper, Mr Milburn said: "Andrew Lansley’s primary concern is GPs. To change this you don’t just need confidence. You need to be able to speak loudly with one voice and not many."

Mr Milburn said in his time as health minister he could not recollect a meeting with representative pharmacy bodies.

Speaking in a session organised by C+D and IPM he asked: "Why can the BMA and UNISON walk straight into the secretary of state’s office but not pharmacy? It’s because we don’t speak strongly enough and we don’t speak confidently enough about what we can offer."

Mr Milburn added that pharmacy needed to approach ministers with proactive lobbying. He said ministers generally had, “a desk full of problems; a room full of problems; and a department full of problems”. The sector should approach the new minister with solutions to some of those problems, he suggested.

See the video of Alan Milburn at www.chemistanddruggist.co.uk

Regulator referrals should be timely, poll finds

A test case destined for the High Court is set to question whether the pharmacy regulator should have a duty to process fitness to practise cases in a more timely manner.

The case comes after a report that found cases took on average 15 months to be investigated and referred to the Investigating Committee under former regulator Regulator referrals should be timely, poll finds the RPSGB (C+D, October 2, p6).

In a few weeks we’ll be asking the High Court whether the answer to that should be yes. We have a case which took nearly three years to get from the completion of investigations to the point where the Society registrar wrote and said he was referring the pharmacist to the Investigating Committee."

The C+D Conference poll found 94 per cent of the audience believed the answer was yes.

Mr Reissner also found more than half of conference attendees felt pharmacy regulation was over the top to achieve its aim to protect the public.

"Pharmacy and branded manufacturers must find a way to reduce the adversarial nature of their relationship."

Mark James, group managing director, AAH pharmaceuticals

"E-health will become more important. Many of the large IT providers, and by large I mean international, are looking to health as the next dynamic and fast-growing area."

Chris Brooker, business development director, The Co-operative Pharmacy

"It has never been more important for countries to implement a strong, coherent pro-generic policy that ensures barriers to market entry are as low as possible."

Michael Cann, chair, British Generic Manufacturers’ Association

C+D Conference in brief...

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Sector must toe government line to get major funding changes

EXCLUSIVE C+D CONFERENCE PSNC chief warns conditional approach may be needed

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Major changes to pharmacy funding may take some time to come to fruition and are likely to be conditional on the sector taking on further roles, PSNC chief executive Sue Sharpe has warned.

Mrs Sharpe told the C+D Conference at the Pharmacy Show that the results of the cost of service inquiry, on which future negotiations could be based, would not be available for some time. “The cost of service inquiry data collection was done at the beginning of the year. We are still a few months, I would say – certainly a number of weeks – before we get some raw figures out of it,” she explained.

And, even with the data, new funding levels would depend on the government’s willingness to fund at the level identified, and that may come with conditions, she warned. “The government is going to want to see pharmacy is going to move in the direction that it wants to see,” she said. She pointed to the government’s comments in the health white paper, which outlined a role for pharmacy as “a lot more than just dispensing”. It said the sector would be important in public health and essential in making sure patients use their medicines well.

But Mrs Sharpe was positive about pharmacy’s future. “It’s important to remember that a few years ago pharmacy was never mentioned in government white papers. Nowadays it’s there, and it’s there always with a recognition that pharmacy can do a lot more for the NHS than it has done until now.”

Sue Sharpe: cost of service inquiry results unlikely for some time

See the video of Sue Sharpe at www.chemistanddruggist.co.uk

New pharmacy regulator ‘here to serve public’

The new pharmacy regulator will not be a “light touch” but will also not bully pharmacists, GPHC chief executive Duncan Rudkin has promised in response to questioning from pharmacists.

Addressing the C+D Conference, Mr Rudkin said he had been asked whether the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPHC) would support or whip pharmacists. “We’re not here to support you, nor are we here to whip you; we’re here to regulate in a way that is respectful of you and serves the public interest,” Mr Rudkin pledged.

He also stressed the regulator was independent, “a body which is not owned by the pharmacy profession and not owned by the government”.

Mr Rudkin went on to address complaints from pharmacists that certificates would no longer be valid as proof of registration. “I can understand that [sense of loss] at a personal level – I think it reflects well on the profession that you value your certificates and professional status,” he said.

But he continued: “From a regulatory point of view, certificates as evidence of registration are not only not helpful, they are positively dangerous because a certificate could be out of date the day after it was issued.”

She warned that after the clawback this October, cheques in January would be affected. “It probably doesn’t feel very much like boom to you but, believe me, when January comes it will feel like bust,” she said.

And she warned: “The time it really hits you is in your January cheque so don’t be lulled into a [false] sense of security if the cheque you get at the end of this month looks much as it used to.”

Cat M woes ahead, conference hears

Contractors should brace themselves for difficult financial times in January when the effects of the latest category M clawbacks will really start to bite, PSNC chief executive Sue Sharpe has warned.

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C+D Conference in brief...

Your views

C+D Conference speakers asked the audience to vote on key issues affecting the sector

69% think GP commissioners are foe
79% have a glass half full outlook about pharmacy
55% think dispensing will become more competitive
57% think pharmacy regulation is over the top

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