

The Pharmacy Report

Dear Sir/Madam

As you are aware the OFT have recently published their report into the process of Pharmacy contract allocation.

The control of entry regulations were introduced in 1987 for a number of reasons:

- 1 Ensure a rational distribution of pharmacies in local communities
- 2 Allow ready and easy access to pharmacies
- 3 Stop pharmacies from clustering themselves around areas with a high footfall e.g. shopping centres and Doctor's surgeries

Over the past 15 years the regulations have been more than adequate. In fact it has work well enough that pharmacists felt confident enough to invest in their premises and provide their patients with additional services. These services are provided at little, or no cost to the patient. For example 'Smoking Cessation', Blood Pressure monitoring, Cholesterol testing, etc. which are promoting healthy living, and ultimately taking pressure away from doctors and other parts of the NHS.

The Government's commitment to deliver a well-planned and managed pharmacy network is in total contrast to the deregulated market advocated by the OFT. The limited resources of the NHS need to be structured and managed to ensure pharmacy services are available to patients when and where required.

If the regulations are abandoned, it is the local communities that will suffer, with a more severe effect on rural, isolated and socially disadvantaged areas.

Patients with the greatest needs, who are traditionally heavy users of pharmacy services, will suffer the most. The elderly, housebound, families on low incomes, young mothers, and those who live in disadvantaged communities, are the people who most value the community pharmacy.

The OFT has failed to see that the pharmacy network's principal focus is the provision of pharmaceutical services, and that pharmacists are NHS healthcare professionals, rather than local shopkeepers. Why are pharmacies being asked to display the NHS logo when they are obviously thought of by John Vickers, as mere 'for profit' street traders.

There has been a number of notable consumer surveys on patient satisfaction with pharmacy, which have shown that patients are happy with the distribution of pharmacies and the services they receive. Paragraph 5.3 of the OFT report states that local access to pharmacies is currently good, with the majority of consumers finding it easy to get to a pharmacy from their home and from their GP's surgery. Their own survey found that 89% of respondents found that their chosen pharmacy outlet was easy to get to from their

home and 86% said it was easy to get to a pharmacy from their GP's surgery. This contradicts their assumption in paragraph 5.63 saying 'the control of entry do not, indeed cannot, ensure good access'.

Deregulation will not increase patient choice. It will merely change the distribution of pharmacies. Pharmacies will cluster around health centres and, spring up in every supermarket. These pharmacies are solely positioned for financial interest, not patient interest.

Supermarkets, such as Asda have been the main proponents for change. They are merely looking for a cheap, 'back door' entry into the pharmacy market. They are more concerned with shareholders earnings than the quality of service that patients receive.

It was reported in the Daily Mail on the 28th January that John Vickers will not get involved in the enquiry into the sell off of Safeway, as he had previously done work for supermarket groups, and therefore had a major conflict of interest. Why then was he allowed to take charge of an investigation instigated by the same supermarkets?

Deregulation will destroy the platform from which Government intends to launch a wide range of enhanced pharmacy services- as detailed in 'Pharmacy In The Future- Implementing the NHS Plan.'

Were the OFT to have its way, after an initial surge in pharmacy openings, there will, in the long run be a reduced, rather than enhanced provision of pharmaceutical services. All the OFT will have succeeded in doing, if the plans were to be approved, is cause instability in the pharmacy sector, kerb investment in pharmacy, and risk stripping a valuable asset from the community, in particular the high streets of the UK, which are currently being killed off by the Supermarkets.

Yours Sincerely

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