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Ronnie Fraser Esq
Scottish Executive
Primary Care Division
St Andrews House
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Dear Mr Fraser

The Office of Fair Trading Pharmacy Inquiry

As you are probably aware the OFT has recently published a report recommending that the control of entry and the current process for awarding a Pharmaceutical contract to dispense NHS prescriptions be abolished. The report is flawed and has failed to consider the most important issues. The OFT has looked at the retailing activities of community pharmacies which can account for less than 20% of the average pharmacy's turnover. They have failed to look at the NHS professional services being delivered, the most important being the dispensing of prescriptions.

By allowing a free market where a pharmacy could potentially be opened anywhere, this would result in pharmacies being clustered in areas of high foot flow and would result in a large number of pharmacies located near GP surgeries and in large busy shopping areas eg supermarkets. This would put great stress on the pharmacies in more rural areas or in areas of high deprivation. This would serve to destroy the currently stable and more rational distribution of community pharmacies where there is equitable access to NHS pharmaceutical services particularly for those who can have difficulty accessing services normally because of their age, disability or for mothers with young children.

We must strive to keep a rational network of community pharmacies providing a high standard of pharmaceutical services. This is critical if we are to continue the modernisation of the Scottish NHS and implement the paper published in 2002 "The Right Medicine, a strategy for pharmaceutical care in Scotland". A free market would result in reduced income for the average pharmacy and this in conjunction with uncertainty over the future of pharmacy would mean that we would see less investment in our premises and in extending the roles which we currently provide. This can only be to the detriment of our patients and the health of the Scottish people as a whole as pharmacists are currently the most accessible of all NHS professionals.

The other obvious issue is that of resources, there simply wouldn't be enough trained pharmacists to man the new supermarket outlets. I currently employ a second pharmacist to work with me in my pharmacy as well as a Saturday locum, if I lost either of these assets I could not continue to offer the wide range of services, let alone the novel schemes currently being developed. Again this would be to the detriment of the patients.

This is one of the most important threats affecting community pharmacy and we must ensure that we get the correct response from the Scottish Executive on this matter.

Yours sincerely

Peter J H Cook MRPharmS