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Dear Mr Fraser,

As a priest and a resident covering a large remote area I am alarmed at the response to the Office of Fair Trading report of the 17<sup>th</sup> January 2003 recommending the removal of Control of Entry Regulations governing Retail Pharmacy.

I would urge you to consider the following concerns.

The OFT claims that the current regulations restrict consumer choice and convenience. It may appear that an increased number of pharmacies will enhance patient choice but in fact the spread and location of pharmacies is a far greater factor influencing access than simply numbers. Current regulations promote the rational distribution of pharmacies, but an open market will encourage clustering around surgeries and health centres. Pharmacies in residential and remote areas in Dumfries and Galloway may find that with the dilution of business they are no longer viable. This will impact greatest on the most vulnerable in our communities, the elderly and those of a lower socio-economic standing who may not have the luxury of their own transport. How can this be considered improved access?

Another aspect of improving access is extended hours; this may be an area where adequate provision in some locations is lacking. However I am suspicious of the supermarkets who may promise this, you only have to look at the number of supermarket pharmacies who no longer open as late as the store itself, they too must be able to financially justify their opening hours.

Another major fear I have is that with complete removal of restriction to entry, there is nothing preventing doctor's practises around the country opening their own pharmacy in their surgery. Not only would this see the end of community pharmacy, it would surely be a conflict of interests, ultimately detrimental to patient care.

I have also been reliably informed that there is currently a shortage of qualified pharmacist's, combine this with an increase in pharmacies. This could result in an alarming situation where pharmacies in remote areas may be unable to offer a service as they are unable to attract a pharmacist to work in that area, others may be forced to close to allow for days off and holidays.

The chaos that would follow if the government accepts the recommendations of the O.F.T is alarming. There may be a need to change in pharmacy legislation, however this must build on the present system, not demolishing the structured network that we have and replacing it with anarchy.

I would therefore be grateful if you would urge the Scottish Executive to challenge the recommendations of the O.F.T and arrange for a review of current legislation in light of a need to change for the better, not destroy the good service pharmacies are providing.

Yours sincerely,



Father Stephen Sharkey