

Why we need the pharmaceutical scientists on-side!

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Introduction

What has an English community pharmacy contractor got in common with a Scottish based academic, former manager and public health specialist? A desire for unity - we come from very different backgrounds, but we hope you will vote “YES” like us. We both believe passionately that the new RPS has the potential to be a world leading authority on and leader of pharmacy practice, science and education; public health and medicines safety. We hope you want that too!

Perhaps it doesn't seem so, but this vote is crucial. At its hearts lies the question of what sort of Royal Society we will have: Will it be powerful, mature influential and outward-looking or weak, insecure, introspective – a non-entity with little influence?

The White Paper “Trust Reassurance and Safety (2007)” said that: *“The “Royal College” should be a learned and authoritative organisation, supporting excellence, professionalism, and innovation in the science and practice of pharmacy”.*

In 2007, Lord Carter concluded, following a Kings Fund conference of pharmacists and pharmacy organisations: - *A Royal College for Pharmacy, with medicines and patients as primary foci, .. should aim to inspire and develop all its practitioner members, and create .. a forum for pharmaceutical scientists, particularly those working in the academic and industrial sectors*

The Clarke Inquiry which was open to comments from any member, concluded *“the professional body should have clearly-defined separate categories of membership, for instance .. ‘Scientist Member’ etc. Subscription rates and voting rights could differ between categories...”*

The Transitional Committee - also an open process involving many pharmacists and organisations said *“To be a powerful and trusted body that reflects the importance of the profession, the organisation must include all those engaged with the development of medicines and with the education of the profession as a whole. So the new Professional body will offer membership to Pharmaceutical scientists”.*

However the old RPSGB Council rightly left the final decision to the members of the new professional body.....and here we are!

The case for scientist membership

The RPS has inherited a worldwide reputation in science and practice through conferences and publications. It has a new Royal Charter with objects that define the roles it must fulfil. Should it fail to deliver on these objects it will damage its credibility, authority and external influence to the detriment of its members.

The objects are :-

- (1) to safeguard, maintain the honour, and promote the interests of pharmacists in their exercise of the profession of pharmacy;
- (2) to advance knowledge of, and education in, pharmacy and its application, thereby **fostering good science** and practice;

(3) to promote and protect the health and well-being of the public through the professional leadership and development of the pharmacy profession; and
(4) to maintain and **develop the science** and practice of pharmacy in its contribution to the health and well-being of the public.

These Charter objectives recognise the breadth of pharmacy from scientific research and development, formulation and testing, to prescribing, use and disposal of medicine and the need to support pharmacy and pharmacists.

To advance education it needs input from academics. Undergraduate education is often provided by non-pharmacists and indeed some hugely-successful and influential Schools of Pharmacy are led by non-pharmacist academics and membership would help them better teach our future members.

We, they and our Society can only gain by having such NON-voting scientific members. Only a small number of pharmacists are involved in education, science or research. More scientists will help RPS to lead and speak with greater authority on scientific and educational matters. It offers greater opportunities for working with and influencing other professions and Governments.

We gain as scientist members will have to commit to our values and vision and comply with the same codes as pharmacists. They will have better understanding of pharmacy and pharmacists and access to publications, conferences, resources, our networks and to leaders of our profession.

Concerns

There is a discussion group on the subject on the Society's General Forum http://groups.rpharms.com/forum/forum_posts.asp?TID=8079&title=scientist-membership open to posts from any member and you may wish to join. Let us deal with the main concerns raised there so far.

Many objections are associated with imagined fear and myth. In truth, many Royal Colleges offer associate or non-voting affiliate membership to interested "others," sometimes with few strings attached, so this move, far from being unusual is common.

This is not an open door. The RPS has defined very strict conditions over who qualifies for membership. They will need to be committed and top quality scientists and a Membership Committee of pharmacists will vet applications. Any scientists who misbehave or undermine the RPS could also be removed from membership.

Scientists will not take over as they have no access to decision making via the National Boards; they are not even allowed to vote for the scientist place on the Assembly, never mind for a pharmacist of their choice. However, the Assembly has a pharmacist scientist member whose networks would be improved with wider scientific membership.

The Society is already diverse and has a number of non-pharmacist members. The Society has traditionally recognised non-pharmacist excellence by awarding honorary membership and scientist beneficiaries see this as a truly prestigious honour. In 2010, 18 non-pharmacists were awarded honorary membership and student and associate membership categories were approved. There is a considerable number of retired and former pharmacists who do have a vote, but cannot be elected, yet nothing detrimental has ever occurred, so why should it do so now?

We ask you to have the self-confidence to vote YES and make the RPS as a world recognised leader of science and practice. It really is a win-win option. The choice is yours, but whatever you decide please DO vote - you will have to live with the consequences.

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