

Speech at the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee Annual Dinner

11 March 2009

My Lords, Ladies and Gentleman.

It's a real pleasure to join you this evening. It's my first big chance, in fact, to speak to you personally as a group.

So if I may begin with an introduction. I'm Phil Hope, Care Services Minister and as you may know I share responsibility for pharmaceutical services with my fellow Minister Dawn Primarolo.

It's a measure, I suppose, of how important the Government views the sector – you get two Ministers, not just one.

But, from both Dawn and me, I'd like to start by expressing my sincere thanks to everyone here tonight.

For the progress you've already made in implementing the White Paper.

For the contribution you're making everyday to improve the health of individuals and communities.

And for your ambition and commitment to go much further in the future, as a key part of a modern health service.

I have to say, Dawn and I are particularly grateful and excited by the enthusiasm and warmth you've shown towards the White Paper.

It feels like there's a strong consensus about where this sector can go next – and a shared commitment to get us there – and that bodes well for the future.

Looking back – a year of progress

Of course, annual dinner speeches tend to involve a bit of looking back, and a bit of looking forward, and I want to follow that convention tonight.

Because it was just twelve months ago that Dawn used this very event to trail the White Paper – not even published at that stage.

What a difference a year makes! Chris has already showered us with examples of how you've embraced the White Paper vision. How you've taken the mantra of change, and translated it into the everyday practice for your customers.

I've had the chance to see for myself the way this is reshaping the "pharmacy experience" on the ground, if I can put it that way.

I saw first hand the potential that modern pharmacy has in promoting good health when I visited a pharmacy in my constituency. A great example. And when I had my blood pressure taken, I was told I was in perfect health.

In Corby, we will be developing a new public strategy to tackle obesity and a strategy to reduce cardio vascular disease. I have no doubt that pharmacies will play a key role.

So make no mistake.

We do see and we do value your hard work, the way you're driving the agenda forward.

And doing so in the spirit of genuine partnership – working with Whitehall, working with each other, and working across the healthcare sector.

If I can mention another great example: the work the PSNC has done with NHS Employers and the GPC on new briefing documents for GPs – one on repeat dispensing, one on Medicines Use Reviews.

A good illustration of pharmacies, not just changing practice, but shifting relationships – with other healthcare professionals increasingly using your knowledge, your skills, your expertise to improve their own ways of working.

A ‘quiet revolution’ in healthcare

All of this spells out a clear truth. That the days of two-dimensional community pharmacies – the traditional model, if I can put it crudely, of dispensing drugs and selling soaps and cosmetics – these days are over.

The reality today is three-dimensional. Pharmacies are increasingly expanding across the Primary Care landscape.

- Planting good health on the high street.
- Allowing more patients to get the advice, the support and the treatments they need.
- And helping them do so more quickly, more conveniently and more effectively than ever.

So that's today's reality. That's where we find ourselves at this moment.

But I know all of us are looking to the future. So the big questions are what we want tomorrow to look like, and how do we get there?

From the Government's perspective, we want to continue working with you, as you build your presence as a persuasive force in public health.

And I think there are three areas where this sector can now make all the difference.

Transforming services – sexual health

The first is in sexual health.

SHAs and PCTs have already had nearly £27 million extra funding this financial year to improve access to contraception, with more to follow next year.

I know some pharmacies are becoming a focal point for this investment, following Lambeth and Southwark PCT's lead.

But, of course, this carries with it a strong advisory and sign-posting role.

We need you to be asking the right questions, improving people's awareness of sexual health issues, and referring them onto other services, where appropriate.

In other words, community pharmacies need to be trusted sources of advice on sexual health – pushing safe sex messages out into the community – as all the evidence so far suggests you are.

Transforming services – healthier lifestyles

A second priority area is promoting healthy lifestyles.

As you may be aware from the Change4Life TV campaign and other media reports, tackling obesity is a particularly hot topic for us at the moment.

Pharmacies already offer diet and nutrition advice as part of essential services for people with diabetes and hypertension, or those who smoke or are overweight.

But the evolution must continue. I know a number of pharmacies now operate weight management programmes commissioned by PCTs.

Again, that's something we warmly welcome.

Because as with sexual health, you're helping to bring these services out of the shadows and into the mainstream. Removing the embarrassment factor. Removing the sometimes intimidating atmosphere of the clinical environment. And replacing it with the more familiar, everyday rhythms of the high street.

Transforming services – long term conditions

And that's also important for the third priority I want to mention. Your crucial role in monitoring, managing and preventing long term conditions.

As Chris has already indicated, we must use you far more effectively to confront on the country's biggest killer – cardio-vascular disease.

Last year, the Prime Minister announced a new programme of vascular checks.

Some PCTs are already involving pharmacies in this. We certainly think you've got a big role to play, and we're currently working with the PSNC on a new service specification template for PCTs who do want to commission from pharmacies. We expect this to be available by the summer.

Diabetes care is another area that's ripe for expansion. Many pharmacies already offer blood glucose testing and blood pressure measurements, alongside more general lifestyle advice, which is great.

There will soon be a new guide, commissioned by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and the National Pharmacy Association, to help you take the next step forward.

It should help to strengthen the role pharmacies play in the holistic care of people with diabetes, working alongside PCTs and diabetes specialists. It should be completed by the autumn.

Pharmacies can also play a key role in cancer awareness.

You'll shortly receive new leaflets on lung cancer, that my Department has developed. We'll also be discussing how we get you more involved in referring people with tell-tale signs of cancer to specialist services.

And last but not least, we must work with you more to support people after they receive newly-prescribed medicines for a long term condition.

Recent NICE guidance reinforces the shocking fact that up to half of patients don't take prescribed medicines as intended.

Again, you're perfectly placed to take on a greater supporting role – one that's more convenient for patients, and can deepen the relationships you build with your customers.

Now I realise that's rather a long wish list!

So how do we make it happen?

Supporting change – fairer funding

Well, first, we understand that better services need better funding. We're asking you to do more. It's right you get what you need to deliver on these promises.

As you may know, funding for pharmaceutical services isn't an area I'm personally involved in, but I know Dawn Primarolo is working the PSNC to refine the system so that it's fairer for all parties.

But, of course, funding is only part of the story. We also want to improve the systems that will support our White Paper ambitions.

I want to touch on three key areas that I particularly plan to champion in the months ahead.

Supporting change – better commissioning

First, better commissioning.

Some PCTs are brilliant at this; others not so good. I want bring ‘the rest’ up to standard of the best.

That’s why we’re developing a new guide on becoming a world class commissioner of pharmaceutical services – to build the awareness and aptitudes within Trusts; and to encourage and reward innovation across the sector.

The new guide will cover both primary and community care, and will be similar in format to the ones recently published on commissioning GP and dental services.

But it’s important this guide doesn’t sit on the shelves gathering dust, so I’ll also be personally writing to all PCTs to emphasise its importance when it’s published towards the end of this month.

Supporting change – fair representation

I also plan to impress on PCTs the second point I want to make: the importance of fair representation.

It's crucial that you have a clear voice in key commissioning decisions – including, for instance, the pharmaceutical needs assessment.

I will therefore be encouraging all PCTs to make sure there is appropriate pharmacist input at Board level whenever such decisions are taken. I also want to see every PCT have a named Board member with responsibility for pharmaceutical services.

Supporting change – effective IT

And my final point is to stress that IT is and must remain a key piece of the reform jigsaw.

We're in a great position to move forward on a number of fronts.

We can build on the infrastructure provided by the Electronic Prescription Service.

But we can also go much further, using things like NHS Mail and the Care Record Service to push forward the integration and information capture necessary to deliver better services for patients.

We'll also be working with NHS Connecting for Health on a number of White Paper commitments.

Scoping how we capture and share information from pharmacists as part of the healthy lifestyles essential service.

And looking at how IT can help all of us get evaluation data on what is our *raison d'être*: how well we are actually doing to improve people's health.

Of course, information management comes with a health warning of its own. And in our eagerness to push ahead, we must not let patients down by compromising their confidentiality.

Striking that note of caution is important. Yes, let's move forward with real confidence and purpose, but let's also show an appropriate degree of deliberation too.

Conclusion

Above all, let's get the balance right. Because if we do, then the future looks very rosy indeed – both for pharmacies and the people you serve.

The best community pharmacies already embody the vision of high quality, patient-centred care that last year's NHS Review and this year's Health Bill demand.

So you are very much leading the way in delivering 21st century public services. And I want that to continue.

It presents an exciting opportunity for your individual businesses in deepening your relationships with your customers, helping them to keep healthy and helping you to take a leading role in the community.

But more than this, it's a tremendous boost for the whole sector's reputation. Increasingly integral. Increasingly trusted. Increasingly central to a modern, assertive and confident health service.

That's where we want you to be. That's where I believe you want to be too. I'm looking forward to working with you as we make it happen. Thank you.