

## PSNC CHIEF EXEC STANDS UP FOR PHARMACY

**26 April** - PSNC Chief Executive Sue Sharpe defended community pharmacists' broadening clinical role last week, after a prominent GP argued that allowing certain drugs to be provided over the counter at the pharmacists' discretion could put patients in danger.

The questions around pharmacists' capabilities were raised in a Daily Mail article on the 13<sup>th</sup> April, where the Chair of the BMA's GP Committee's Prescribing Committee Dr Bill Beeby commented that "It is one thing to sell a product over-the counter that treats an ongoing condition that has been previously diagnosed by a GP; it is very difficult thing to expect the pharmacist to diagnose a condition from scratch, on a stranger for whom he has no medical notes or records. Many pharmacists will have excellent diagnostic skills. Others may not".

Sharpe highlighted pharmacists' expertise on BBC Radio 4's consumer discussion programme *You and Yours*, which featured a segment examining the effects declassification of certain drugs might have on pharmacists' and GPs' respective roles. Having opened with a statement on declassification processes from PAGB Chief Executive Sheila Kelly, the piece featured a 6 minute discussion between Ms Sharpe and Dr Beeby.

In the course of the discussion, which developed from questions around the declassification of a medicine for men with BPH, Sue Sharpe said:

"Pharmacists are developing the role they provide in helping the NHS meet the tremendous demands on its resources. This is an area where we know that a lot of men don't come and get help for their symptoms...I really do think this is a part of an important process in making it easier for people to access care and using the fact that pharmacists are easily accessible and cheaper than the great expense than the GP service costs the NHS".

Dr Beeby argued that:

"Obviously making things available over the counter is very important and I think self care is something that most GPs would approve of... It's not always going to be given out by pharmacies. Again, if you look at the web you'll see that this drug is going to be available quite easily across the internet and there isn't going to be that face-to-face control that's normally there within a pharmacy itself...we've got to balance one risk up against each other".

Speaking after the broadcast of the *You and Yours* segment, Sue Sharpe said:

"I think it's vital that people recognise pharmacists' capacity to provide expert health advice at the heart of the communities they serve. As highly qualified medicines experts, pharmacists are ideally placed to support patients embarking on new courses of medication. They are also perfectly positioned to offer guidance on the broader effects of certain medicines, and on the possible implications of symptoms patients may be experiencing. In many cases, responsible pharmacists will refer patients to their GPs. But we must accept that given pharmacies' broad accessibility, their capacity to engage hard-to reach sections of the patient population, and their

cost-effectiveness relative to other health professionals, they are a natural first port-of-call for patients seeking expert health advice.

“I was delighted to see that over the course of our discussion, Dr Beeby appeared to endorse the importance of self-care, and the “face-to-face” guidance a pharmacist can offer. There is much that we can agree on, despite the impression one might receive from unnecessarily incendiary press statements. It is crucial that pharmacists and GPs work together to ensure joined-up provision of high quality primary care; in future this cooperation should be based on mutual recognition of each profession’s capabilities.”

~Ends~

#### **Notes to Editor**

1. PSNC (The Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee) is the body that represents community pharmacies in England and Wales on NHS matters.
2. The Daily Mail article *“Pharmacists are selling more drugs over the counter, but is your chemist putting your life at risk?”* was published in the Daily Mail on April 13 2010, and can be found here: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1265526/Pharmacists-selling-drugs-counter-patients-havent-consulted-doctor-chemist-putting-life-risk.html>
3. The April 22 episode of *You and Yours* can be streamed online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/features/you-and-yours/>. The segment referred to above begins at 09:38.

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