

## Press Release



9 July 2003

### **NPA WELCOMES CALLS FOR OVERHAUL OF PRESCRIPTION CHARGES**

The National Pharmaceutical Association (NPA) has long advocated the abolition of prescription charges and therefore welcomes the Social Market Foundation's report, "A Fairer Prescription for NHS Charges", and the Creeping Charges report from the National Consumer Council, both of which call for a radical overhaul of NHS charges.

The NPA, which represents community pharmacists, is very aware that the system of prescription charges is riddled with inequities and although the charges have increased almost every year since 1981, this has had no effect on the total sums of money received by the Government for prescriptions. Almost half the population is exempt from paying – children under 16, students from 16 – 18, expectant mothers, over 60s, and those living on social security – and because these groups are the heaviest consumers of health care, this means that some 85% of prescription forms carry no charge. The burden falls on adults of working age in employment.

Sufferers of chronic conditions such as asthma, cystic fibrosis and multiple sclerosis risk their lives because they cannot afford the treatment they need. There are prepayment certificates available for patients who need high numbers of prescriptions but those who most need these 'season tickets' – people with low incomes and multiple health problems – are the least able to afford the lump sum payment.

"Patients on low fixed incomes who do not qualify for exemption suffer the most. We know that prescription charges deter many people from getting medicines which their doctor prescribes", said NPA Chief Executive John D'Arcy. "Each year there is an increase in the charges and more patients on multiple medications make their own, potentially ill informed decisions about which medicines to forego. This could lead to a second visit to their GP or if their untreated condition deteriorated, even costly hospital treatment."

As prescription charges have risen, more medicines have become cheaper than prescription medicines when they are bought over the counter at the pharmacy. Until the system is overhauled pharmacists are happy to advise patients which is the cheaper option.

**So if you are at all worried about the cost of your prescriptions, ask your pharmacist – you'll be taking good advice!**

**-ends**

**Notes to editors**

1. For more information contact the NPA Press Office, on: 01727 85 86 87, ext. 3340 or 3227 or visit [www.npa.co.uk](http://www.npa.co.uk).