

Press Release



29 July 2003

NPA BOARD BELIEVE 'BALANCED PACKAGE OF PROPOSALS' COULD LEAD TO 'PHASED DEREGULATION'

At the July Board Meeting the NPA reviewed the published Government position and 'balanced package of measures' on the OFT recommendation to partially 'open up' the pharmacy market in England. The Board's view was that regrettably, the statement fails to provide sufficient clarification, and consequently, this paucity of detail in the proposals make it impossible to predict how the proposals will impact both in the short-term and the long-term. Further, the proposals raise a large number of questions with regard to the new exemptions.

NPA Chairman, Hemant Patel, said: "Government needs to answer these questions, and address the profession's concerns as a matter of urgency, so that we can respond fully and authoritatively on the forthcoming consultation. Until we receive answers to these questions, we remain concerned that what has been proposed could turn a system that works well – for patients, pharmacists and the NHS – into one that doesn't. The Board concerns are that, on a worst case scenario, the compromise proposed by Government could lead to a framework for phased deregulation."

As it now appears to read, the Government position enables the local authorities (PCTs) to licence new pharmacies – but without providing specific guidelines as to any demonstrated need for additional pharmacy services, nor an a priori examination as to the effect of any newly authorised outlets on the existing pharmacies in the community

The NPA view remains that this could, effectively, represent deregulation by the back door – and result in unforeseen, unintended negative consequences. The Government appear to be unwilling to acknowledge that the provision of fair and equitable pharmacy services in the frame of the NHS requires strategic oversight and regulation.

Mr Patel added: "Our position has always been that the OFT report was 'a solution looking for a problem'. Given the indisputable importance of community pharmacy services to local communities, and the need for pharmacies to invest in services on the back of the new pharmacy contract and 'vision' document, that opinion is even more salient. Now is clearly not the time to play fast and loose with the system."

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Notes to Editors

1. For more information, please contact the NPA Press Office, on: 01727-858687, ext 3340, 3227, 3265, 3311.