

## Press Release



18 August 2004

### **GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT FOR PHARMACY AND PATIENTS**

In formulating the 'Balanced Package' for the changes to the control of entry regulations for community pharmacy, the Government faced a difficult task in balancing the diametrically opposed views of whether to deregulate this market. The NPA, as the body representing the professional and business interests of the nation's community pharmacists, is fully supportive of the aim to strengthen the pharmacists' role and to improve access by greater choice. However, it must be recognised that community pharmacy is in the business of healthcare rather than retail. And as such, the issues are more complex than in a normal retail/free market situation. Pharmacy's healthcare role is acknowledged by Government in terms of the investment it is currently seeking to make in enhancing the community pharmacist's healthcare contribution – and in the reservations it has expressed about the OFT proposals that the market should be fully deregulated. Indeed, we welcome the remarks made today on Radio 4 by Health Minister, Rosie Winterton, that the Government recognised the vital role that community pharmacies play in the local community.

John D'Arcy, NPA Chief Executive, commented: "We need now to carefully examine the fine details of the proposals because we have real concerns about the possible unpredictable impact of the exemptions – particularly the one stop primary care centres and the 15,000 sq metre exemptions. The exemptions must be implemented in a way that makes their use an exception to the rule - thereby minimising their impact on existing services."

"What we mustn't have is 'deregulation through the back door'. The opening of new pharmacies under the new exemptions could serve to suck business away from existing pharmacies. If this happens, existing pharmacies may be forced into reducing the level of services on offer. And in extreme cases, existing pharmacies may be forced into closure. There is no doubt that a reduction in services or closure will adversely affect local communities – in particular the higher users of pharmacy services: the elderly, infirm or mothers with young children. These are the groups that will face the greatest difficulty in getting to pharmacies located further afield."

ENDS