

Press Release



31 March 2003

RESEARCH REVEALS YOUNG MUMS AND THE AGEING MOST LOYAL TO, AND IN NEED OF, THEIR LOCAL PHARMACY

A new survey from ICM Research has shown high levels of customer concern at the prospect of a possible reduction in local pharmacy services or closures across the country, should the Government decide to go ahead with the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) recommendation to deregulate the market. Almost four out of five adults are worried at the risk this would pose. This concern is especially acute among mothers with young children (88%) and the ageing (85%) – the very customers who rely most heavily on the accessibility, convenience and expertise provided by their local pharmacy.

The research revealed very strong levels of customer loyalty and usage for independent pharmacies: an astonishing 53% of respondents have been regular customers of their local pharmacy for more than 10 years. 80% regard their local pharmacy as the most convenient place to buy medicines, a 'short walk away' for two thirds of patients. This is most vital to the mothers of under-fives, of whom 56% walk to their local pharmacy and other, less socially advantaged and less physically mobile segments of the community. (43% of the D/E households in the U.K. do not own a car.)

Moreover, independent pharmacies are perceived by 7 out of 10 adults as having caring, friendly staff. ICM research demonstrated that the ageing and the D/E social classes were especially likely to see their pharmacist and pharmacy as being 'at the heart of their local community' in a valued and trusted role as 'a family friend'.

NPA Chief Executive, John D'Arcy, said: "This important consumer research study reinforces the message that we have consistently given to Government: the OFT's stark recommendation to open up the pharmacy market to competition will be a retrograde step – and not in patients' best interests – least of all those in our society who are most vulnerable to any pharmacy marketplace dislocations. We have never lost sight of the fact that the patient is the principal stakeholder. Deregulation cannot be the answer: it is disproportionate to any shortcomings with the current arrangements."

Indeed, this was acknowledged by DTI Minister, Patricia Hewitt, only last week in her statement in the House of Commons, when she said: "... *It is essential that pharmacists should be able to fulfil not only their present valued and trusted role, but the wider role envisaged for them in the NHS Plan: simply deregulating the market will not do that...*"

Health Minister, Alan Milburn, has previously stated that the Government wanted a situation where: “... *more NHS patients can use the skills of community pharmacists, who are trained clinicians, for advice, information and services.*” The NPA fully endorse this objective.

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Notes to Editors:

1. The National Pharmaceutical Association (NPA) is the trade association that represents the professional and commercial interests of the owners of around 11,000 community pharmacies in the United Kingdom.
2. The survey by ICM Research was commissioned by the NPA. ICM interviewed a random sample of 1008 adults aged 18+, by telephone between the 21st and the 23rd of March, 2003. Interviews were conducted across the country and the data have been weighed to the demographic profile of U.K. adults (excluding Northern Ireland).
3. For more information, or an interview, please contact the NPA Press Office, on: 01727-858687, ext 3340, 3227, 3311. For in-depth information on the survey, please contact Ian Blythe at EMPATHY RESEARCH, on: 0208 202 5854.