

Pharmacists want greater freedom to prescribe controlled drugs

New legislation allowing pharmacists to act as independent prescribers does not go far enough, according to *Pharmaceutical Journal*.

Authors of the article, all health professionals in the treatment of addiction, want independent prescribing extended to controlled drugs, such as methadone and buprenorphine (Subutex), which it does not include at the moment.

At present the pharmacist's prescribing role in relation to controlled drugs is restricted by a clinical management plan that has been agreed with the patient and their doctor. The authors argue that pharmacists, who have prolonged

periods of training and experience and regular contact with patients, should be more closely involved in these prescribing decisions.

'The requirement for daily dispensing and supervision of methadone and buprenorphine often means a pharmacist will see a patient six times each week... contact with the pharmacist will almost certainly exceed any contact with the doctor,' the article points out.

Pharmaceutical Journal is the weekly publication of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. This article was in the 11 February issue, archived at www.pharmj.com

Prisons conference shapes agenda for future

'Good and effective drug treatment meets both health and criminal justice agendas,' Martin Lee, head of the NOMS Prison Drug Strategy Unit told the 'Prisons and Beyond' conference in Leicester last week.

Getting more people into drug treatment lay at the heart of government strategy, he said. But there needed to be a culture change to merge prisons and probation and put the offender at the heart of services.

The Criminal Justice Act aimed to make sure only the right people came to prison, and there needed to be greater visibility of community penalties, said Mr Lee. The Drug Intervention Programme

(DIP) had been the 'most important initiative in years' and there was now 'much more certainty than a year ago'. Drug treatment workers now had a key role in keeping drugs out of prison and there were new initiatives underway to engage families in drug treatment.

The conference would bring direct feedback to NOMS on what worked and what didn't, said Mr Lee. 'Be controversial,' he urged delegates. 'Your opinions will reach the wider policy-making audience.'

Full reports of the conference with feedback from sessions will shortly be appearing on www.fdap.org.uk, and there will be a special prisons issue of DDN.

NTA remains champion to 2008 and beyond

Following the conclusion of the ALB Review (independent review by the arm's length body) the NTA is now planning for a long-term future.

Ministers have indicated that they see the NTA playing a vital role beyond the end of the current drug strategy in 2008 and will continue to be the national champion of drug treatment leading positive change to deliver improvements in health and reductions in crime.

NTA Regional Teams will continue in their current roles, probably until April 2009. It is anticipated that by this time the new regionally based Strategic Health Authorities will have demonstrated their capacity to deliver both the health and crime aspects of the local performance management of drug treatment to Ministers satisfaction.

The central function of the NTA will continue beyond 2008/9. Although the post 2008 role has not yet been formally agreed it is likely to include oversight of the effective national delivery of drug treatment on behalf of Department of Health and Home Office, including:

- National guidance on drug treatment commissioning and practice
- Information analysis, quality assurance through the setting of national standards, and
- Providing a centre of excellence for research and policy development.

The NTA says it is delighted that the ALB Review has endorsed the agency's contribution to drug treatment since 2001 and identified a clear ongoing role helping services and partnerships deliver the post 2008 drugs agenda.

Notes from the Alliance

Daren Garratt takes a laid-back look at the soundtrack of cultural change and empowerment over past decades – with a serious message for the power of the user's voice.

Culturally, I tend to think of things from a musicologists perspective. For me, music has always been the most effective and prescient barometer of national mood and a backdrop to cultural change, and I can think of moments in the past five decades where there's been an unparalleled 'Year Zero' of musical/cultural importance:

- 1956 – Elvis Presley released Heartbreak Hotel (and Rock n Roll was born).
- 1966 – Beatles released Revolver (and Psychedelia was born).
- 1976 – Sex Pistols happened (and Punk was born).
- 1986 – Smiths released The Queen Is Dead (and although nothing was 'born', the fact that it's become socially ingrained justified the decision of many working class youths like myself to reject macho, conservative, heterosexual and nationalistic norms).
- 1996 – Prodigy released Firestarter and Underworld released Born Slippy (and, arguably, ensured that hedonistic club-life and recreational drug-taking was no longer an underground activity).

So what is it with the sixth year of a decade and a shift in cultural norms, and what's this tenuous link got to do with this column? Can't answer the former, but I honestly feel that if we play this year right, we'll herald unprecedented strides for the user involvement movement. We're already seeing unique partnerships being made between user-led organisations and national bodies that will only serve to influence and improve a user's treatment journey; partnerships that I personally feel will elevate the user experience, expertise and voice, and sow the seeds for sustainable future development.

Take the Department of Health and their decision to fund a National Model Of Advocacy. It's unprecedented. The government is releasing funds so that drug users can support other drug users and ensure they get adequate scripting, job opportunities, and, well... respect!

Take the Royal College Of General Practitioners (RCGP) and their recent decision to accept the Alliance's basic advocacy training as an entrance exam to their own Certificate in the Management of Drug Misuse in Primary Care; the latter being an established, prestigious and unique training resource that further validates the integral role that users have in the treatment process.

Take the National Treatment Agency and the specific focus that has been placed on independent, user-led advocacy in this year's treatment planning cycle. This, coupled with their decision to fund advocacy commissioning and best practice guidance alongside documents designed to support users in the workplace, will ensure that local partnerships have to work proactively with users as providers and equals.

This is a massive year for us. When else have we had 'the establishment' turn round and say, 'OK. You say you can do this, so do it!' It's never happened before, and now's the time for us all to pull together and prove that we can do it.

So is it fair to say that users being given a clear directive from the state to work as joint, equal partners with providers, clinicians and government is a cultural Year Zero? I should co-co!

'But what's the soundtrack?', I hear you cry... Well, Das Fringe and The Nightingales are both recording albums this year, and if that doesn't make the earth move then you've not got ears. You have been warned and remember you read it here first.

Daren Garratt is development manager at The Alliance. He also happens to be drummer with Das Fringe and The Nightingales.