Health Inquiry
Welsh Language Commissioner
Market Chambers
5-7 St Mary Street
Cardiff
CF10 1AT

5 February 2014

Dear Sir/Madam

Welsh Language Commissioner’s Inquiry into Primary Care in Wales

Thank you for your letter dated 6 December providing us with an opportunity to respond to the Commissioner’s call for evidence to contribute to the inquiry into the use of the Welsh language by primary care services.

About the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS)
The Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) is the professional body for every pharmacist in Great Britain. We are the only body that represents all sectors of pharmacy in Great Britain.

The RPS leads and supports the development of the pharmacy profession within the context of the public benefit. This includes the advancement of science, practice, education and knowledge in pharmacy. In addition, it promotes the profession’s policies and views to a range of external stakeholders in a number of different forums. Its functions and services include:

- **Leadership, representation and advocacy**: promoting the status of the pharmacy profession and ensuring that pharmacy’s voice is heard by governments, the media and the public.
- **Professional development, education and support**: helping pharmacists to advance their careers through professional advancement, career advice and guidance on good practice.
- **Professional networking and publications**: creating a series of communication channels to enable pharmacists to discuss areas of common interest.

Response to the Inquiry
As the devolved office of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society working in Wales we are committed to the principles of the Welsh Language Act 1993 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. We are committed to treating the English and Welsh languages equally in the conduct of our public business and continue to uphold the principles set by our Welsh Language Scheme which was previously approved by the Welsh Language Board under Section 14 of the Welsh Language Act.

We recognise the importance of access to Welsh speaking pharmacists for people living in Wales and appreciate the importance of effective communication in terms of patient safety and helping people to achieve good health outcomes from their pharmaceutical care. As an organisation committed to developing and upholding the professionalism of pharmacists we want patients and members of the public to be able to access pharmacy services in the language of their choice wherever practicable. It is critical for the safety of patients that they can communicate clearly with members of the pharmacy team and that pharmacists are able to completely understand all instructions written by a
prescriber before being able to safely dispense those medicines. Community pharmacists in Wales dispense high volumes of medicines every day and are also obliged to dispense prescriptions from European Union countries in a manner that ensures patient safety.

We are aware of a recent and isolated incident regarding the interpretation of a prescription in North Wales and while we are not in a position to comment on this particular case, we believe it highlights two key issues; the importance of health professionals working together to meet the needs of patients and to overcome any language barriers; and the need for community pharmacies to be aware of the language needs of the Welsh population.

We expect all pharmacists registered in Great Britain to adhere to the standards of conduct, ethics and performance laid out by the pharmacy regulatory, the General Pharmaceutical Council. These state that pharmacy professionals must make patients their first concern, providing services that are safe and protect the wellbeing of patients and the public. We are confident that pharmacists work to these principles as a matter of priority and endeavour to address any issues that may impact on the safe supply of medicines, including language issues. We also believe that the professional competence of a practising pharmacist must be the primary concern of any employer above and beyond any other issues when appointments are made to pharmacy positions in Wales. The ability to speak Welsh should be welcomed of course by pharmacy employers in Wales but we believe this should be a desirable criteria rather than an essential one, reflecting the demand for Welsh speaking pharmacists among different communities in Wales.

Bilingualism is an important part of Welsh life and we would expect Welsh community pharmacies to endeavour to offer services through the medium of Welsh and English. We are cognisant however that it will not always be possible for community pharmacies to provide services in Welsh and English in equal measure. The nature of the transient locum workforce in community pharmacy for instance can pose a barrier to access to the provision of bilingual services and access to a Welsh speaking pharmacist may not always be possible. In these situations we would encourage our members to ensure they work with their support staff in the best interests of the patient.

Where access to a Welsh speaking pharmacist is available we understand that dialogue between Welsh speaking patients and the pharmacist is usually conducted in a bilingual manner as a natural conversation, with the more technical aspects of health care often being articulated in English to help ensure greater understanding of the clinical issues in question. We believe therefore that any recommendations about the use of the Welsh language in primary and community care should reflect the reality of bilingualism in Wales and the natural conversational style of a Welsh and English speaker living in a bilingual community.

Overall, we are confident that wherever practicable community pharmacists across Wales are endeavouring to provide their services in a way which meets the language needs of their patients. As NHS contractors, community pharmacies should be made aware of their responsibilities regarding the Welsh language and should be supported in discharging that responsibility by appropriate bodies including Local Health Boards and the Welsh Language Commissioner. We appreciate that Language Line facilities have been put in place by Health Boards which may be of some assistance to community pharmacists. We are concerned however that Language Line alone is not enough to support community pharmacists and their teams in meeting the language needs of patients. A Welsh ‘toolkit’ for primary and community care practitioners, accredited by the Welsh Language Commissioner, may offer one solution to increasing access to bilingual services.

Finally we would like to put forward recommendations which we believe could support the future growth of bilingualism in primary and community care:
• Welsh language policies for health practitioners working in primary and community care should accurately reflect the reality of bilingualism in Wales.
• The ability to speak Welsh should be considered as a desirable criteria in the appointment of community pharmacists and pharmacy teams where there is a demand for bilingual services.
• Community pharmacists should be supported in meeting the bilingual language needs of the Welsh population. A Welsh toolkit for community pharmacists which addresses key Welsh phrases and covers the technical issues of dosage and cautionary labels should be developed, accredited and endorsed by the Welsh Language Commissioner.

I trust this is helpful. If you require any further information please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Jocelyn Parkes
RPS Director for Wales