

Steve Brine MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Department of Health and Social Care
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS

19 July 2018

Dear Minister,

Re: Workforce health and wellbeing

We are writing to you because of our concerns about workforce pressure and the impact this could have on patient care.

As you know, pharmacists comprise the third-largest health profession and play a vital role in supporting patient safety and reducing the risk of medication errors.

Whilst stress among the health and care workforce is not a new issue, our members are increasingly concerned about the impact this is having within the pharmacy profession as well as added psychological stresses linked to workload and financial pressures.

Regardless of where health services are delivered, it is important to maintain a safe and effective workforce for the future, encouraging people to remain within the health professions as well as attracting new joiners to meet the growing demand on the NHS.

We know that pressures in one profession have a knock-on effect across the health and care workforce and so we welcomed the NHS GP Health Service launched early in 2017. As we move towards greater integration of health services, we should also consider a whole-team approach to supporting workforce health and wellbeing.

A number of pharmacy employers are already taking steps to support welfare and resilience of their staff and Pharmacist Support offers a 'Listening Friends' telephone helpline for callers to talk in confidence to a pharmacist about any stresses they are facing. This service saw a 40% increase in the number of calls in 2017 compared with the previous year.¹ However, resources for services such as these are limited and dependent on charitable donations. The RPS does not believe that the mental health of such an important professional group responsible for supporting patients everyday should be dependent on charitable giving.

As the NHS demands ever greater input from pharmacists it also has responsibility for ensuring their health and wellbeing is protected and supported. The NHS GP Health Service, which offers confidential support for doctors with issues relating to a mental health concern, should be replicated for pharmacists and other primary care providers and we would be eager to work with NHS England to make this happen.

The fear of criminal prosecution around inadvertent dispensing errors has been a longstanding concern and so we have welcomed your continued commitment to progress the rebalancing of medicines legislation. With the Order now passed in relation to registered pharmacies, we will be responding to the latest consultation on hospitals and other pharmacy services in due course.

We know the profession will now look to these new measures working in practice. For our part, the RPS will continue working to promote a culture where people feel able to report errors and learn from their mistakes to enhance patient safety.

We recognise that the pharmacy profession works across a range of sectors and responding to the challenge on pharmacists' health and wellbeing will require an ongoing dialogue between employers, government and the NHS. We would welcome an update from you on any plans the Department has around supporting the health and wellbeing of the healthcare workforce, including the potential extension of a service such as the GP Health Service to the pharmacy profession.

The RPS will continue to empower pharmacists to exercise their professional responsibilities through dialogue with stakeholders, and direct support to its members.

Yours sincerely,



Sandra Gidley, FRPharmS
Chair, English Pharmacy Board
Royal Pharmaceutical Society



Sibby Buckle, FRPharmS
Vice-Chair, English Pharmacy Board
Royal Pharmaceutical Society

Cc: Chief Pharmaceutical Officer, Dr Keith Ridge