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Press release

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CPO review and APPG meeting must prompt progress on decriminalisation, say pharmacy bodies

Plans to decriminalise dispensing errors must be progressed and should be the focus of work being done by the UK chief pharmaceutical officers (CPOs), pharmacy organisations have said.

Speaking ahead of an All-Party Pharmacy Group (APPG) meeting on the topic later this month, Pharmacy Voice, PSNC and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society set out their vision for the treatment of dispensing errors in pharmacy and called for the CPOs to focus on the issue.

In November the CPOs pledged to examine the balance between medicines legislation and professional pharmacy regulation to ensure that the two are “optimally designed to provide safety for users of pharmacy services, while facilitating and reducing the barriers to responsible development of practice, innovation and a systematic approach to quality in pharmacy”.

This work offered a valuable opportunity to finalise plans for the decriminalisation of dispensing errors and could be informed by the upcoming APPG discussion, the pharmacy organisations said.

Pharmacy Voice, PSNC and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society said:

“Pharmacy wants genuine dispensing errors to be dealt with via its regulator. Only those cases of a serious magnitude, where there is evidence of wilful or grossly negligent behaviour, should be subject to a legal process.

Every mistake should be treated by the profession, the NHS and the relevant authorities as a learning opportunity, so that pharmacy practice can be improved for the benefit of the public.

This requires an open culture in which mistakes can be reported and learned from, and in which areas of concern or risk can be identified before mistakes are made and steps taken to reduce the potential for patient harm.

We do not believe that the current balance between regulation and legislation promotes such an open culture and so we were delighted to see the chief pharmaceutical officers’ express renewed interest in this area last year. We hope that the long overdue decriminalisation of dispensing errors will form a key focus of their work and look forward to updates in due course. We also look forward to the APPG meeting on this subject which we hope will give some valuable learning to prompt progress on this matter.”