



**Royal
Pharmaceutical
Society**
of Great Britain

Law and Ethics Bulletin

Restrictions on the Self Selection of Pharmacy Medicines to remain

After giving detailed consideration to the views that members of the profession and the public gave during a consultation process, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's Council has agreed that the restriction on the self-selection of pharmacy medicines should remain.

In March 2007 the Society began a public consultation asking whether there should be restrictions on the way in which pharmacy (P) medicines are displayed. Currently, legislation requires that P medicines can only be sold from a registered pharmacy by a pharmacist, or under the supervision of a pharmacist. In addition, the Society has placed ethical restrictions on the accessibility of P medicines, stating that, P medicines must not be available for self selection. Therefore, P medicines are generally displayed behind the counter to be distributed by pharmacy staff only.

The revised Code of Ethics for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians (which comes into force on 1 August 2007) requires that pharmacists and pharmacy technicians must 'seek to ensure safe and timely access to medicines'. Expanding on this requirement, the Society's Professional Standards and Guidance for the Sale and Supply of Medicines requires that:

'Procedures for sales of OTC medicines enable intervention and professional advice to be given whenever this can assist the safe and effective use of medicines. Pharmacy medicines must not be accessible to the public by self-selection.'

The purpose of these requirements is to enhance patient safety by ensuring safe and appropriate selection of P medicines and enabling pharmacy staff to advise and intervene where necessary. While this means that P medicines cannot be available for patients readily to select in the way that GSL medicines and general items of commerce are, the restriction does not preclude methods of display that enable patients to get a better view of the range of P medicines available.

There are currently a number of ways in which P medicines could be placed on open display without being available for self-selection. These include placing P medicines behind Perspex or glass screens and in display cabinets. Other methods include displaying empty or 'dummy' packs of P medicines.

If P medicines are to be placed on open display, systems need to be in place to prevent self-selection and staff need to be appropriately trained on the procedures to be followed when displaying and selling P medicines. As a matter good practice:

- (a) A risk assessment should be undertaken to assess the potential risks associated with individual display methods and determine the types of P medicines to be placed on open display. This may vary depending on the type of display method being used. Particular care should be exercised with, for example, substances liable to misuse or medicines that have been recently re-classified from the prescription only category to pharmacy status.
- (b) Notices should be displayed to advise patients how they can access the P medicines they require.

The Medicines Act places legal restrictions on the sale and supply of P medicines. Therefore, when P medicines are placed on open display they must be purchased from cash registers that are located on the registered pharmacy premises. P medicines must be sold by a pharmacist, or someone acting under the supervision of a pharmacist.

The Society's Council has agreed that any pharmacy with P medicines available for self-selection will be given time to make alternative arrangements. The transitional period will end on 31 December 2007, after which the Society will expect pharmacists and pharmacy owners to ensure compliance with the professional requirement that P medicines are not available for self-selection within pharmacies.