



Continuing Threat to Local Pharmacies

By Diana Cormack

High Road chemists have been fighting the Office of Fair Trading's proposals to abolish the controls which regulate the number and positioning of pharmacies. These controls, established in 1987, set out to provide a rational distribution of pharmacies to which everyone would have easy access. They require anyone who wishes to provide NHS pharmaceutical services to apply to the NHS locally for a contract. Contracts are granted on the basis of necessity or desirability.

Over the years many small pharmacies have become a valuable neighbourhood resource, playing an important support role within the local community. However, the large supermarket chains now want a greater piece of the action and are calling for the removal of the entry controls so that they can increase the number of dispensing pharmacies which they operate in-store. The OFT concluded that this would result in more pharmacies, improved services and more price competition in over-the-counter medicines. It also anticipates cost savings for the NHS and for pharmacy businesses.

Ask your local pharmacist

But recent research suggests that deregulation could have a devastating effect. Local dispensing chemists would gradually close down, forcing people to travel further for their medication. Hardest hit would be those with the greatest need, such as the elderly, infirm, housebound, families on low incomes, nursing mothers with young children and those who live in disadvantaged communities.

An announcement by Trade Secretary Patricia Hewitt seemed to imply that the pharmacists had won their case, but now they are not so sure. Whilst in Scotland and Wales the decision not to support the OFT proposals has already been taken, pharmacists in England cannot yet afford to be complacent as she is calling for "a balanced package of measures."

The National Pharmaceutical Association is airing these and other relevant issues. If you wish to know more or want to record your displeasure, pop into your local chemist; then you can ask your pharmacist. Didn't there used to be an advertising campaign telling us to do just that?

Marathon Martin

Martin Sutherland of King Street will be taking part in this year's Edinburgh Marathon on 15 June.

He aims to raise £1000 for the Thistle Foundation, which provides services for the disabled. For more information or to sponsor Martin, visit his web page at www.justgiving.com/annualmarathon.



Centre manager Terry Stone and volunteer advisor Kenny Anifowose (a 3rd year law student) are ready to help. Photo by Daphne Chamberlain.

Advice for East Finchley

By Daphne Chamberlain

About 4,000 people a year turn to the East Finchley Advice Service for help. Over the last five years there have been only two complaints.

"We encourage an honest feedback," says manager Terry Stone. "It's very important that people get what they want from us."

Most enquiries are about benefits, housing and debt, but a fairly high proportion of women want help with marital problems. Fifteen specialist advisors give their services free on matters such as divorce, immigration and common law. These professionals each come in on average of once a month.

Day-to-day staff, also all volunteers, are inspected by Barnet and given induction training, some of it with agencies like the London Advice Service Alliance and Shelter. This is followed by top-up courses to keep up to date.

Clients are often referred to

specialist agencies, but links are two-way. The Ann Owens Centre send people to the Advice Centre for things like help in filling in forms. A comprehensive range of forms and leaflets is on display in the Centre, with staff ready to give assistance.

Terry Stone is the only paid worker. A Chartered Engineer, he worked in Human Resources Personnel at the BBC for 20 years, before retiring at 55 and starting as a volunteer at the Centre. Since becoming manager, he has introduced a computer system. Keeping to the principle of utilising expertise, the database was devised by a systems analyst volunteer.

Terry's bosses are the Management Committee, around eight people, again

all volunteers with specialist knowledge. The Committee meets every six weeks, and assesses policies and procedures at every AGM.

Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous and Over-Eaters Anonymous meet at the Centre, which also houses Councillors' Surgeries.

Users, says Terry, reflect the population as a whole. Anyone is free to drop in. The Centre, on the corner of Church Lane and King Street (tel. 020 8444 6265), is open Monday to Friday, 10am-12.30pm and 1.30-4.00pm, with late opening on Tuesday, 7-8 pm.

Terry Stone is also available at the Green Man Centre, Strawberry Vale, 10am-12.30pm on Wednesdays.

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