

Community pharmacists' engagement with public health in Great Britain

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Introduction

The gamut of pharmacy policy documents published in Great Britain since the mid-1980s supports the development of the public health function of community pharmacists. This function has been focused on individual-level intervention and service provision. However, pharmacy has been criticized for this focus and for a reluctance to engage with the wider public health agenda¹.

Numerous barriers to pharmacy's engagement with public health have been suggested including apathy, a lack teaching of the science of public health in the undergraduate curriculum and limited exposure to public health in the day-to-day practice of community pharmacy².

Furthermore, within pharmacy there is a low level of cooperation between the fragmented and isolated sections that make up the profession³, including between pharmacy owners and pharmacy employees within the community pharmacy sector. Pharmacy has been described as possessing a uniprofessional culture that understates the value of partnerships³. Such a culture is anathema to the collectivist approach of the wider public health movement.

Objective

- ▶ The objectives of the research were:
 - ▶ To examine to what extent community pharmacists in Great Britain believed that their job was concerned with local public health issues.
 - ▶ To explore any associations between employment status and the extent to which community pharmacists in Great Britain believed that their job was concerned with local public health issues.

Methods

▶ The project received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Life and Health Sciences at Aston University.

▶ After piloting, in August 2006 a self-completion postal questionnaire was sent to practising community pharmacists in Great Britain (n=1998), stratified for country of residence and sex.

▶ A follow-up was sent to non-responders 4 weeks later.

▶ A final response rate of 51% (n=1023/1998) was achieved.

Results

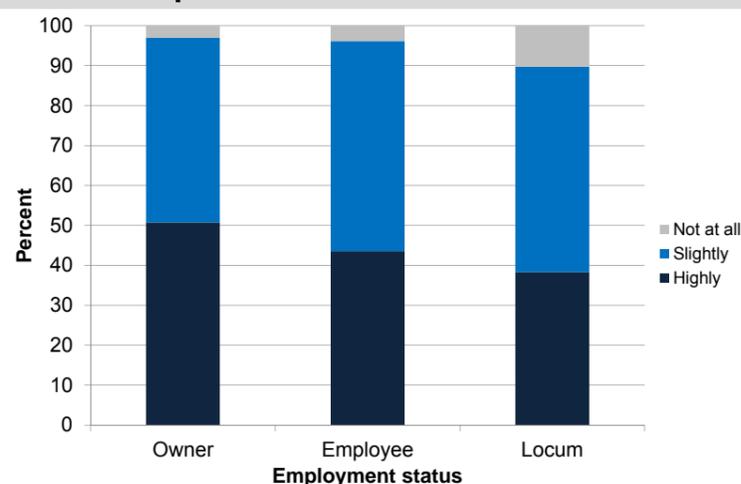
Respondents were asked to indicate their answer to the question "to what extent is your present job concerned with local public health issues?" on a three-point scale – "highly", "slightly" or "not at all" concerned with public health. They were also asked to indicate whether they were pharmacy owners, employee pharmacists or self-employed locum pharmacists.

Of respondents answering both questions:

- ▶ Less than half (43%, n=384/898) believed that their job was highly concerned with public health.
- ▶ 51% (n=460/898) believed that their job was slightly concerned with public health.
- ▶ 6% (n=54/898) believed that their job was not at all concerned with public health.

A relationship was observed between employment status and the level to which a respondent believed that their job was concerned with public health (χ^2 test with P=0.001) with pharmacy owners more likely to consider their job to be highly concerned with public health than employee pharmacists and locum pharmacists (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Employment status and the extent to which job is concerned with public health



Conclusions

This research suggests that community pharmacists in Great Britain are not 'fully engaged' with public health. Pharmacy owners may feel more enfranchised in the public health movement than their employees and locums. Indeed, one-in-ten locums reported that their job was not at all concerned with public health which, as locum pharmacists constitute over a third of actively employed community pharmacists⁴, could be a limiting factor in any drive to strengthen the public health function of community pharmacists.

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