



**Royal  
Pharmaceutical  
Society  
of Great Britain**

1 Lambeth High Street, London SE1 7JN

Tel: 020 7572 2335

Fax: 020 7572 2503

# News release

5 February 2010

## **SOCIETY CALLS FOR URGENT GOVERNMENT ACTION ON SHORTAGE OF HOSPITAL PHARMACISTS**

### Key points

- A quarter of the UK junior pharmacist posts are currently vacant, up from 22% in 2008
- A recent study showed hospital pharmacists intercepted almost all prescribing errors before they could affect patients (2)
- The Royal Pharmaceutical Society is calling for urgent action by the Government to remedy the situation

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB) is calling on the Government to take seriously the impact on patient safety because of a shortage of hospital pharmacists.

Inaction is no longer acceptable to our profession or the patients they care for in hospitals.

Around a quarter of junior pharmacist positions remain unfilled up from 22% in 2008 (1) - a trend that concerns us greatly.

These staff work across all aspects of hospital pharmacy including clinical work on wards, checking the safety and efficacy of prescriptions and providing information on medicines.

RPSGB Chief Executive Jeremy Holmes said: "We have written to the Secretary of State to express our deep concern as a professional body at the on-going problem of recruitment and retention of hospital pharmacists on band 6 of Agenda for Change.

“The importance of hospital pharmacists in relation to patient safety cannot be underestimated, and has been highlighted yet again by recent studies in relation to medication errors by prescribers (2) and in specific areas such as paediatrics (3).

“These studies show just how much hospital pharmacists are relied upon by prescribers to pick up medication errors and how they improve prescribing in the first instance - a vital role in patient safety.

“The recommendations made by the Department of Health to address the problem of recruitment and retention on a local level are welcome, but the independent Pay Review Body has now twice recommended specific action to improve the situation, including payment of a national recruitment and retention premium. The Department’s measures are unlikely to be reviewed again by the Pay Review Body before late 2011, and patients cannot wait that long.

“All parties involved recognise the problem of vacancy rates within England, Scotland and Wales. Our concern is that unless the Secretary of State addresses the issue as a matter of urgency, patients will be left at risk of potential harm for an unacceptably long time.”

**Ends**

**For media enquiries please contact the  
Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain's Public Relations Unit  
020 7572 2653**

**Notes to editors:**

(1) The National NHS Pharmacy Staffing Establishment and Vacancy Survey 2009

<http://www.nhspecd.nhs.uk/surveys.htm>

(2) An in depth investigation into causes of prescribing errors by foundation trainees in relation to their medical education – EQUIP Study. Dorman et al. GMC Dec 2009. [http://www.gmc-](http://www.gmc-uk.org/FINAL_Report_prevalence_and_causes_of_prescribing_errors.pdf_snapshot.pdf)

[uk.org/FINAL\\_Report\\_prevalence\\_and\\_causes\\_of\\_prescribing\\_errors.pdf\\_snapshot.pdf](http://www.gmc-uk.org/FINAL_Report_prevalence_and_causes_of_prescribing_errors.pdf_snapshot.pdf)

(3) The incidence and nature of prescribing and medication administration errors in pediatric inpatients. Wong et al, Archive of Diseases of Childhood Jan 2010: 95:113-118.

[http://adc.bmj.com/site/misc/The\\_incidence\\_and\\_nature\\_of\\_prescribing.pdf](http://adc.bmj.com/site/misc/The_incidence_and_nature_of_prescribing.pdf)