



# Dear Members,

What does it mean to be a student pharmacist, whereby we dedicate at least 5 years of our early professional lives to training and being educated in the safe and effective use of medicines? It means many things to many people: possibly serving the community you have always lived in and love, possibly moving to a new city and tackling their challenges with fellow professionals in hospital, possibly researching groundbreaking new therapies with industrial companies. But one thing it can and should mean to us all is becoming a healthcare professional whose responsibility, duty and pleasure it is to put people first.

Last week, during an episode of *This Morning*, conversation turned to pharmacists and their role in tackling obesity. The conversation focussed on the community sector and exposed some views which have caused upset and anger within the wider pharmacy profession. Why is this important? Our professional identity ensures that we are recognised for the qualities and attributes we work hard to develop, now as students, and later as pharmacists. We can be the biggest advocates of our colleagues in pharmacy who provide essential services on a daily basis, changing and saving lives - and why not? We know how hard our colleagues work for each other, their teams, and people all over the country every day. So what exactly was said?

A guest on the show, Sam Delaney, expressed his personal opinions. I want to make clear that I feel there is absolutely nothing wrong about that, and that I welcome his negative comments, as without them I would sadly not have been compelled to write to you all. This reactive approach is one I feel has hindered the celebration of pharmacy and is another way we can all advocate with honesty and enthusiasm for our profession. Comments describing pharmacists as 'pretend doctors' who 'fetch boxes' and 'sell nail varnish' are, of course, uncomfortable to hear and I have empathy with those expressing their frustrations publicly. Mr Delaney has achieved two important things though:

- Highlighted all too common opinions and misconceptions that are held regarding pharmacists and their roles.
- Encouraged the whole profession to share experiences and express universal support through the #whatwedoinpharmacy movement

It would be very easy to condemn the language used to describe pharmacists and scathingly criticise the offhand and undermining deconstruction of a vital NHS service, however it is rarely the easy action that is the most impactful, sustainable and effective (as I am sure all pharmacists who manage complex regimens will appreciate). These opinions, however abrasive to hear, are rooted in experiences that we all have to be accountable for. Not every day, or even any day, will be perfect,



and we all will have made mistakes. Learning from these, sharing the challenges of frontline healthcare delivery, and improving our practice are responsibilities we all take seriously.

How we are seen by the public is imperative to the fantastic work that is done by pharmacists of every discipline. Supporting our colleagues of all professions, rather than falling into archaic hierarchy, challenges the 'pretend doctor' remark. Making time for campaigns that will improve patients' lives (including tackling obesity, in the privacy of a consultation room, with explicit patient consent, Mr Delaney), challenges the doubt over pharmacists' legitimacy to operate as effective public health workers.

The problem here is not that our profession does not do great things, it is that we have been unsuccessful so far in communicating that in such a way as to ensure the public shift their views. This of course in the caveat of a hopefully ever-decreasing minority of the public.

I welcome This Morning, Mr Delaney, and all those with positive and negative opinions to continue the conversations around pharmacy. Around the medicines experts, trained to be effective communicators, with a desire to help and support those in need. Share your views, ask difficult questions, demand more of pharmacy where you feel there are gaps. But also recognise the good work that is done, understand that pharmacy is a profession like any other that needs the funding required for a challenging and clinical healthcare role, appreciate the staff who work in the pharmacy (all of them) for their dedication to a career helping us all.

And all of us, as the BPSA, be advocates for each other and our future roles. Take on the professional responsibility not as a hardship but rather as a privilege that we work in so vital a field that we are held to the highest standards. Share your experiences of meeting and working with inspiring leaders, of being helped to learn and grow, and being supported financially to see and do all of the amazing things that the student world of pharmacy offers.

It is my honour to serve you with the rest of the BPSA Executive, we look forward to meeting you, hearing from you, and working with you to ensure we all become the future that we want the profession to be. Welcome challenge, enjoy being asked difficult questions, embrace your identity and that of the profession. Be passionate about Mental Health, about fair and full representation of the great diversity of our membership, be passionate about our role in delivering on the UN Global Goals, about training to be an inspiration to our successors.

I encourage all of us to not be disheartened by the recent discussions, but to be grateful for an opportunity to join in the conversation through #whatwedoinpharmacy.

Please do share your voice and my inbox is always open for suggestions,

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