

Success! Pharmaceutical Council embraces secular reforms

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The independent pharmacists' regulator has approved new standards governing the role of religion in pharmacy services, in a move welcomed by the National Secular Society.

The General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) launched a consultation on "religion, personal values and beliefs" late last year with new guidance that placed more emphasis on the rights of patients, rather than the religious beliefs of pharmacy workers.

The NSS responded to the consultation, calling the proposals "forward-thinking and robust".

NSS campaigns director Stephen Evans said, "We are very pleased that the regulator has pushed ahead with this new guidance, which will better protect the rights of patients."

The new standards mean pharmacists will not be able to send a patient to a different provider just because an individual pharmacy worker has a religious or philosophical objection to their request for treatment or medication such as emergency contraceptives.

The Secular Medical Forum, part of the National Secular Society, raised concerns with the regulator when a prior consultation suggested that patient's needs should be 'balanced' against pharmacists' religious views.

Dr Antony Lempert, the coordinator of the Secular Medical Forum, welcomed the decision of the GPhC and said the regulator was "to be commended" for its decision and for heeding criticism of its earlier stance.

He said that information about the consultation responses supplied by the GPhC showed that the majority of pharmacists who responded "both supported the changes and identified as religious.

"It is clear that the professionalism of most pharmacists is paramount and that it is only a small cohort of very religious pharmacists who wish to impose their own views on patients and obstruct reasonable, legal care in the pharmacy setting."

"The onus is now on pharmacists to ensure that they don't put themselves in a position to obstruct patient care," Dr Lempert said.

Under the new guidance it is "explicit" that the "responsibility is on the pharmacist to ensure that no-one's care is compromised because of their views."

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