



**Royal  
Pharmaceutical  
Society**  
of Great Britain



# Practising or non-practising pharmacist?

Guidance for members



When you receive your retention fee paperwork for 2005, you will be asked to

confirm that you are a practising pharmacist, or to make a declaration that you are non-practising. For most pharmacists this will be a very simple choice as almost all pharmacists who are not retired or on career breaks will be practising.

The decision whether to register as either practising or non-practising is one for individual pharmacists to make. Whether someone is practising or non-practising is dependent upon the nature of the work they undertake or the advice they wish to provide.

## Why it's important

In its role as a healthcare regulator, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain is charged with a duty to protect the public. The discharge of this duty includes taking steps to ensure that pharmacists are competent and fit to practise. It is now a requirement that healthcare professionals undertake CPD and it is the duty of the Society as the regulator to ensure that this is carried out and documented.

Following significant consultation with members, the Council of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society agreed in April 2003 that a pharmacist is 'practising' if he or she *undertakes any work, or gives advice, in or in relation to the science of medicines or the practice of healthcare.*

The requirements will apply equally to members and fellows.

## What is a practising pharmacist?

A pharmacist is deemed to be practising if he or she:

*undertakes any work, or gives advice, in or in relation to the science of medicines or the practice of healthcare.*

Key points to note are:

- When you consider your practising status, it may be helpful to ask yourself whether you or others feel that the work you undertake or advice you give has added value or credibility because you are a pharmacist. If so, you are practising.
- It is possible to still be practising if you are retired or not working if, for example, you continue to provide advice on pharmacy matters.
- It is a misconception that a pharmacist who is not dispensing will be able to place themselves in the non-practising category. Even if you do not dispense, you are not automatically non-practising.
- Practising encompasses most pharmacists, not only those who dispense, or work or provide advice in a clinical context. It includes, for example, pharmacists working in industry, academia and administration.
- Just because you undertake work or give advice that could be provided by someone who is not a pharmacist, does not mean that you are non-practising. The fact that those you work with or advise, know you are a pharmacist adds professional credibility to your work and advice.
- If you are in doubt, the fact that something has made you question whether you are a practising pharmacist probably means that you are.
- To assume that you are practising is a good place to start. Only those pharmacists who have truly retired from working in healthcare or providing healthcare advice, or those who have moved on to other non-related careers, have the non-practising route open to them.

## How will it affect me?

If a pharmacist wishes to practise they will need to register as practising. Those who register as non-practising will not be able to practise.

Pharmacists who register as practising will need to sign a declaration stating that they will comply with the Society's CPD requirements. Those who register as non-practising will need to sign a declaration stating that they will not practise. Practising pharmacists who do not comply with the terms of their signed declaration, will face action by the Society.

Non-practising pharmacists will continue to be subject to the Code of Ethics. They will also continue to have access to resources at the Society, including receiving the *Pharmaceutical Journal*, Branch membership and being entitled to vote in Council elections. They will be able to use the restricted title, Pharmacist, but will have to explain, when using it, that they are not practising.

Non-practising pharmacists will be able to move to the practising category. More guidance on how this will work will be given in due course. If this is an important factor in making your decision, then contact the Society for advice.

## Myths and misconceptions

A number of myths have developed about the non-practising category.

One is that someone who is non-practising will not be able to advise family or friends that smoking is bad for them and that eating fruit and vegetables is good.

*This is not the case. Simply informing someone that smoking is not good for their health is merely a matter of reminding them of a fact that is widely known. The same can be said of advising someone of the merits of eating*

*fruit and vegetables. Where a non-practising pharmacist would add professional credibility, and would be stepping over the line, is if he or she provided advice on smoking cessation products or treatments, or on the details of a specific diet in relation to a particular medical condition.*

Yet another myth is that a non-practising pharmacist would have to stand by while someone took inappropriate medication and in doing so was putting his or her health or life at risk.

*If it becomes apparent that someone is putting his or her health at risk through inappropriate medication, the non-practising pharmacist has not only the right to intervene but also the ethical responsibility. In many cases it may be non-urgent and the person involved may simply be advised to talk to their pharmacist, doctor or other healthcare professional. In other more urgent instances, the advice may have to be more direct.*

Non-practising pharmacists who do not comply with the terms of their signed declaration, by practising while registered as non-practising, will face action by the Society commensurate with the circumstances.

## Exercising professional judgement

Exercising professional judgement clearly has a large part to play in determining when or whether to offer advice. Understanding and being clear about the reasons for providing advice in exceptional circumstances will be important if you are asked to account for your decisions.

It is important to appreciate that knowledge and skills decline with time, so for example, recommended dosages can change. So if you are a non-practising pharmacist giving informal advice about say, simple analgesia, you would need to be sure in your own mind

that the recommended dosage has not changed since you stopped practising. If you have not been doing CPD, can you be sure whether you are in a position to offer this advice? This is where professional judgement comes in.

Professional judgement is equally important for practising pharmacists. If someone asks you a question about his or her medication, as a practising pharmacist you would still have to make the judgement as to whether you are in a position to offer that advice.

## Your decision

The person best placed to decide whether or not you are practising is you. That judgement will need to be in line with the definition and guidance provided by the Society, as set out above. You should feel sure that you could account for your decision should it be challenged.

## Where to get more advice

Tel: 0845 606 6285

Email: [am\\_i\\_practising@rpsgb.org](mailto:am_i_practising@rpsgb.org)

[www.rpsgb.org](http://www.rpsgb.org)



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## Grey areas

For most pharmacists the issue of whether they are practising or not will be a straightforward one. For some it may be less clear.

For example, take a pharmacist working in the pharmaceutical industry but in an IT role. Are they practising or non-practising?

*Well, that depends. If he or she is a network administrator, then they could make the case that the fact that they are a pharmacist adds no value. If they don't want to give advice on medicines, pharmacy or healthcare then they may choose to register as non-practising.*

*If, on the other hand, he or she is a developer of molecular modelling software for medicines design, or a developer of software for a pharmacy or GP computer system, they are in all likelihood practising.*

**Remember: if in doubt, it is likely that you are practising.**