

The Pharmacy Group has had another busy year. We made special visits to see leading edge pharmacy services in hospitals and in the community. We have produced a number of reports, including our proposals for the inclusion in the government's white paper on primary and social care, and our views on NHS IT development. We've held a number of meetings in public on various themes and our guests have included David Colin Thome, the primary care tsar, Fiona Adshead the deputy CMO, the then pharmacy minister Jane Kennedy, and various DH officials.

Much of our work focused around the development of primary care services, seeking to produce constructive proposals and feedback both before and after the publication of Our Health, Our Care, Our Say.

We have listened carefully to the views of NHS stakeholders who attend our meetings - pharmacists, doctors' representatives, the nursing profession, patient groups and many others. Those views have been really helpful to us.

Looking forward, today we are announcing an All-Party Pharmacy Group Inquiry into the Future of Pharmacy. This will be a major piece of work, running at least until the turn of the year.

We want to examine what pharmacists need to do in order to contribute further to healthcare - both in the community and in secondary care settings. There has been encouraging progress recently, for example the implementation of the new contract in England and the gradual roll-out of medicines use reviews in community pharmacy. But its too patchy, its not consistent and it appears that there's not enough joined up thinking. We need to start looking now at how pharmacy's expertise and resource can be deployed to maximum effect.

Our Inquiry will challenge the profession, policymakers and the NHS to think about how pharmacy services should develop over the coming years. Now is the time to set objectives, to identify the challenges and to start planning.

We will be calling a broad range of witnesses to give evidence - from the Department of Health and the NHS locally, through the pharmacy profession, other health professionals and patient organisations.

Among our first steps we will be distributing a questionnaire to relevant stakeholders. But we welcome the views of any interested party. Information about the Inquiry can be downloaded from our website, and we have copies of the press release at the desk here today.

I hope everyone with ideas and views on pharmacy's current and future role in frontline healthcare will contribute to this Inquiry. And I hope the report & recommendations we produce will be helpful in shaping the development of services.

One of the things that we think is needed in primary care, and in pharmacy specifically, is a stable environment in which to plan, invest in and develop both existing and new services. Last week, the Department announced its review of the Control of Entry reforms that were introduced last year. I have to say this review risks creating uncertainty and distraction. I recognise that the Department was committed to doing it but we would like it to be carried out quickly and we would not wish to see further changes made beyond those already implemented last year. Access and location issues will be a feature of our Inquiry and we will want to hear views on the control of entry reforms as we progress.