

A patient in every box

During a recent symposium on drug shortages, a community pharmacist colleague pleaded for more information from his industrial pharmacist colleagues. "We have to face the patients, and explain to the patients why their medicine is not available", he said. He was right, of course, but the point is another, more fundamental one. Down at the coalface of pharmacist-patient interaction, a single box is dispensed to a single patient, a very personal interaction at the core of our profession that is sometimes denied to industrial pharmacists. This is not to diminish for a single moment industrial pharmacists' constant commitment to quality, safety and efficacy of medicinal products, but our daily practice is centred around batch releases, market authorisations, pharmacovigilance, quality assurance – all of which are certainly a commitment as pharmacists to patients. However, it takes a moment of deliberate pause to stop and try to visualise the individual patient to whom the single box of medicine is destined, and, even then, how does one valorise the significance of that box of medicines to that patient, what it means to him or her to be able to get through the day with that much less pain, or to have the hope of another day of life without the fear of remission?

This "patient-centric" approach is a new concept that the pharmaceutical industry must embrace, and we feel that as industrial pharmacists, gathered through our national associations under the banner of EIPG, we must lead the way. Already, we can see elements of this approach in the new provisions of the Unique Identifier, which will seek to provide an assurance that each and every box of medicine delivered to each and every patient is not a falsified product. This is but the tip of the iceberg. Advances in technology have inculcated discussions of "personalised medicine", and it is already evident that this will pose challenges and paradigm shifts in our daily practice of industrial pharmacy. We must be prepared for these challenges and look forward to a future where we see a patient in every box, where our daily activities of ensuring quality, safety, efficacy, accessibility and availability are evermore a guarantee to each and every individual patient.

With this in mind, we would like to reflect on our recent Scientific Symposium and General Assembly in Edinburgh. We must thank the Royal Pharmaceutical Society for having put together an excellent three



days where our discussions centred on new technologies in pharmaceutical manufacturing, and the seeds of the challenges that these pose in the evaluation of the risk-benefit analysis of these products, the release of these products, and the training of future industrial pharmacists to be prepared to be active professionals in these new fields, as well as current challenges in drug shortages that we must necessarily solve in order not to let these existing problems undermine the benefits that future advances in health technology can bring to patients. We must also thank the delegates from the Member States as well as the representatives of organisations that so readily lent their views to our discussion to ensure that we have all come away enriched by the experience and better armed to continue forwards on our road as industrial pharmacists.

We would like to conclude with a look to the future with no small sense of anticipation as this road will lead next year to Paris to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the EIPG. We will have good reason to celebrate for we have come a long way in these 50 years. However, we will celebrate even more the advances in the industry that will enable us, every day in our professional lives, to see with greater clarity the patient in every box.

We wish you all well.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paccioni and Farrugia".

Jean-Pierre Paccioni and Claude Farrugia