

General Pharmaceutical Council

Consultation on religion, personal values and beliefs



Response from the British Humanist Association (BHA) 2 March 2017

About the BHA

The British Humanist Association is the national charity working on behalf of non-religious people who seek to live ethical and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason and humanity. We promote Humanism, support and represent the non-religious, and promote a secular state and equal treatment in law and policy of everyone, regardless of religion or belief. Founded in 1896, we have around 55,000 members and supporters, and over 70 local and special interest affiliates.

The BHA is a human rights-based organisation, with expertise in the 'religion or belief' strand. We also provide pastoral support for the non-religious in a range of healthcare settings.

1. Do you agree with the proposed changes?

Yes

1a. Please explain your reasons for this.

The proposed change does not prevent pharmacists from being able to refer people on to another service provider, if for reasons of religion or belief they are unable to fulfil their request. But it does mean they can only do so when, in so doing, they are still able to provide person-centred care, i.e. they continue to put the person at the centre of the decision-making process and ensure their access to the service they require is not significantly disrupted.

As things stand, it could be, for example, that a pharmacist could refer a service user on to another pharmacy even if no other pharmacy is open at that time, or there is no other pharmacy nearby, which could prevent them from being able to access the services they need. This could potentially mean the service user is discriminated against in breach of the Equality Act.

The new wording however strikes the right balance and is much more in line with more general rules around employees' rights in the workplace. It reflects, for example, the approach advocated in the Equality and Human Rights Commission's recent guidance on religion, belief, and discrimination law.

It is also in line with the person-centred approach being implemented by NHS England; the GPhC may wish to consider the patient-centred outcome measures that are currently being trialled to record the experiences of service users/patients in this area.

2. Does the revised guidance adequately reflect the broad range of situations that pharmacy professionals may find themselves in?

Yes

4. Will our proposed approach to the standards and guidance have an impact on pharmacy professionals?

Yes

5. Will the impact be:

Mostly positive

5a. Please explain and give examples

The guidance might have a short-term negative impact on some individual pharmacists who find, for example, that they are no longer able to be the sole provider of a service in a particular location.

However, this negative impact will be far outweighed by the positive impact the extra clarity in the standards and guidance brings for service users and the profession as a whole.

6. Will our proposed approach to the standards and guidance have an impact on employers?

Yes

7. Will the impact be:

Mostly positive

7a. Please explain and give examples.

Employers need to be aware of the needs to balance accommodating employees' religious convictions with the needs of other employees and service users.

By bringing the standards and guidance closer in line with the more general approach taken to such situations in other workplaces and by the Equality Act 2010, the new standards and guidance will deliver additional clarity to employers that will make it easier for them to carry out their functions while ensuring service users receive the best care available.

There might be a short-term negative impact for some employers where they find that their existing pattern of staffing is no longer adequate. But where this is the case, it is because service users are currently receiving inadequate support, and therefore this negative impact is significantly outweighed by the positive impact of the change overall.

8. Will our proposed approach to the standards and guidance have an impact on people using pharmacy services?

Yes

9. Will the impact be:

Mostly positive

9a. Please explain and give examples.

The new standards and guidance are putting service users first, and this means that they should be always able to access services without any significant disruption due to pharmacists' religion or belief. This will therefore have a significantly positive impact on service users, with no possible negative impacts.

10. Do you have any other comments?

It would be helpful if there was additional guidance for employers on the impact of this change on recruitment. This could be as part of this guidance or expanded upon in separate guidance.

For more details, information and evidence, contact the British Humanist Association:

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