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NHS Hospital Chief Pharmacists in England

26th February 2010

Dear Colleague

EXPORTING MEDICINES FOR PROFIT

On the 14th July 2009, I wrote to you expressing my serious concern about reports that some hospitals were considering exporting, or selling for export, medicines for the purpose of profit.

In the letter I pointed out this was unacceptable. I remain of that view as export of medicines could threaten the medicines supply chain and, in turn, threaten patient care. This is contrary to professional behaviour. Indeed the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain issued a law and ethics bulletin in July 2009 which stated:

“The Code of Ethics requires pharmacists to make the care of patients their first concern. Pharmacists are advised that the export of medicines for commercial or financial gains could be considered a breach of Principle 2 of the Code of Ethics.”¹

The NHS Chief Executive, David Nicholson, has now written² to NHS Trust Chief Executives to highlight that engaging in the trade of medicines jeopardises both patient care and NHS contracts for medicines, and asks Chief Executives to ensure that their organisation is neither engaged in, nor planning to engage in, such activities. Monitor will be writing to NHS Foundation Trusts in similar terms.

I fully support this action and if necessary, I will ensure that any registered NHS hospital pharmacist involved in exporting medicines for profit, to the detriment of patients, is called upon to justify his or her actions. I am asking through this letter that SHA pharmacy leads and members of the National Pharmaceutical Supply Group provide me with the full details of any NHS hospital they know to be exporting medicines for profit.

I should point out that I am fully aware that the vast majority of hospital pharmacists would not remotely contemplate exporting medicines for profit and always focus their efforts entirely on providing high quality patient care.

Yours sincerely



Dr Keith Ridge
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

cc Bill Scott Chief Pharmaceutical officer for Scotland
Jeremy Savage Acting Chief Pharmaceutical Adviser for Wales
Dr Norman Morrow Chief Pharmaceutical Officer for Northern Ireland
Jeremy Holmes CEO RPSGB
Wendy Harris Director of Regulation, RPSGB
Howard Stokoe Commercial Medicines Unit
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National Pharmaceutical Supplies Group

¹ <http://www.rpsgb.org/pdfs/LEBexportmedicines.pdf>

² http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_113129