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Mr Shokat Ali
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5 October 2010

Dear Mr Ali,

Thank you for your letter of 30 August to Her Majesty The Queen about what you see as corruption in the health industry. As your letter raises health concerns it has been passed to this Department for reply.

I note your concerns, and have passed your letter to relevant policy officials.

Whilst the Department appreciates your preference for complementary and alternative medicine, it would not agree that the NHS and pharmaceutical companies are corrupt in their practices.

Before any medicine can be used in the UK it has to have satisfied the most stringent safety tests and be approved by one of the European regulators or the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). In the UK, the MHRA regulates a wide range of materials from medicines and medical devices to blood and therapeutic products and services that are derived from tissue engineering. All medicines are directly approved by the MHRA which issues a 'marketing authorisation', or licence. Manufacturers and distributors are also licensed directly by MHRA. Medical devices are approved by private sector organisations called 'Notified bodies'. Their approval is needed before a *conformité européenne* (CE) mark can be put on the device, though the manufacture of low risk devices is simply registered with the MHRA. The MHRA audits the performance of Notified Bodies. However:

- when a product is on the market and in use, there are more similarities than differences in the ways medicines and devices are regulated;

- there are similar systems for receiving reports of problems with products and similar ways of issuing warnings if problems are confirmed after investigation; and
- there are also similar systems for inspection of manufacture to ensure that companies are complying with regulations, and similar ways of enforcing the law if that proves necessary.

Further information on the regulation of medicines and medical devices is available from the MHRA website at www.mhra.gov.uk/index.htm.

Turning now to the pharmaceutical companies, I should point out that pharmaceuticals are one of Britain's leading manufacturing sectors, bringing in a trade surplus of £4.3billion in 2007. The value of UK pharmaceutical exports in 2007 was £14.6billion, more than £235,000 per employee, but the UK is low in the league of medicines expenditure, spending much less than many of our European neighbours on the medicines we use. However, the UK's two largest pharmaceutical companies are among the most successful in the world.

Britain's pharmaceutical companies' market share is more than all its European competitors combined. Despite this success, British doctors are still reluctant to prescribe new medicines – clinicians in other countries are far more likely to prescribe medicines that have come on to the market in the past five years.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,



Alex Demetris
Customer Service Centre
