We are the future of pharmacy: please let us in

Voting on the establishment of a student member category for the Royal Pharmaceutical Society closes at noon on 9 December. Why should students be allowed in and what value will they add to the profession?

Louise Hemmings President of the British Pharmaceutical Students’ Association

The British Pharmaceutical Students’ Association (BPSA) has now been in existence for 69 years and over the past 40 years has forged close links with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. The recent announcement of student representation within the newly formed RPS offers a historic opportunity for the profession and for the BPSA.

The RPS has asked its members to vote on a new category of membership for students. In the new year, if successful we will see student membership of the RPS become available to individuals who are studying for a degree in pharmacy.

It seems obvious to me that the professional body for pharmacy should be able to offer students membership in order to better support us through our journey to becoming the next generation of pharmacists.

The RPS has been hugely supportive of students over the years by encouraging the work of the BPSA. I am keen to highlight the benefits and value that membership of the RPS will provide to pharmacy students and, without a doubt, the profession as a whole in years to come.

It is important that, as future pharmacists, pharmacy students are afforded all the support and guidance they require and, indeed, the RPS is ideally placed to provide this to them. Student membership will provide the unique opportunity to use the wealth of experience and expertise that exists within its network. This will be invaluable in developing our understanding of the profession and help us to make informed decisions about our future career paths. This support will also complement the pharmaceutical and scientific knowledge we gain throughout our studies, and will guarantee we enter the profession confident and capable.

The BPSA already provides support to students throughout their studies, and students are always eager to meet pharmacists and specialist pharmacists. In many ways, BPSA events already offer these opportunities but allowing students to attend local practice forums and RPS conferences in addition will open up more gateways for them to access this wealth of knowledge. The student category will help to secure sustained growth of the RPS over the years — having established a relationship with us from the start, it will become an inherent part of our professional lives.

Students will have the chance to experience what it is like to be a part of a professional body and will discover the experience and knowledge that can be gained from being a member. In the future, therefore, when student members register as pharmacists, the RPS will gain many enthusiastic new faces who are willing and motivated to take the profession forward.

This is a new era for the pharmacy profession. Students have always wanted to be a part of the RPS and this is the chance to allow this to happen. At the 2010 BPSA annual conference held at Aston University, Birmingham, members of the BPSA mandated that the association should campaign for student and preregistration membership of the RPS (PJ, 22 May 2010, p513). This was passed by a unanimous vote of the BPSA members present. Students want to feel welcomed into their professional body and have a sense of pride about being able to be a part of it.

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We also need to remember the benefits that students can bring to the RPS. We are the future of the profession. We have high aspirations about our practice when we register and, by getting involved with the RPS, we can help build the vision for pharmacy. Students can bring a fresh perspective and can certainly think outside the box; who knows what we can achieve with a strong professional body to support us. This is the chance to allow some new blood into the mix and really shake things up for pharmacy.

Our aim is to work with the RPS to bring students into membership and so together we will deliver support and guidance, as well as networking and development opportunities that are second to none.

I encourage members of the RPS to vote “yes” for the student membership category. Send off your ballot paper today or vote on the internet by going to www.votebyinternet.com/rps10

The Broad spectrum feature is open to any writer. Contributions of not more than 1,000 words, commenting on topical issues can be emailed to deputy editor Graeme Smith for consideration (graeme.smith@pharmj.org.uk)