

Reflections of a Past PSI Council Member

A Walk on the Dark Side

Shortly after being elected to Council, I met an old friend at the annual IPU conference. Tongue in cheek, he expressed surprise at seeing me there . . . "Now that I had gone over to the Dark Side".

The remark neatly summed up the ambivalent attitude of pharmacists to the PSI: a recognition of the need for regulation, tempered by the reality of high registration fees, police-type inspections and a Fitness to Practise regime not fit for purpose. All these issues, plus some, have cloaked the PSI with a mantle more Terminator than Regulator.

My first Council meeting dispelled any impression of Fenian Street as a dour and Spartan place. Far from it, the building is modern, bright and replete with all mod cons. Executive and Council members alike were friendly and welcoming. The mood exuded bonhomie and ease. To this new member, it jarred somewhat, given that the general view of the PSI was one of an unsettling presence, wilful and intent on its own purpose. The induction process was, however, reassuring. Induction was the process whereby new members were briefed on the "Dos and Don'ts" of being on Council. It was like learning the old Catechism. Most readers won't have had that experience so for Catechism they should substitute the

Ten Commandments. Thou shall not do this, thou shall not do that . . . the system was sacrosanct. "R" is not the only thing religion and regulation have in common.

What gradually became apparent on each and every issue was a culture of control within the PSI. This became tangible as a number of situations developed. A proposal early on to give a 24-hour notice of inspection to community pharmacies was defeated. The defeat in itself was not the issue but the efforts on the part of the Executive to kill the proposal went beyond what was acceptable. A 24-hour notice would give pharmacists an opportunity to ring fence the dispensing process during an inspection. The proposal was made on the basis of public safety, making Executive opposition hard to comprehend and a little worrying. A new model of inspection involving self-audit has been subsequently introduced. This was an initiative that originated from the Executive and from start to completion was very much its sole preserve. Knowing one's place in the hierarchy was no longer implied, it was explicit.