Pharmacists ‘unhappy’ at prescription fee payments

AVICENNA CHIEF HITS OUT AT GOVERNMENT

by NEIL TRAINIS

THE CEO of a top pharmacy support group has said many pharmacists are dismayed with the government over the prescription payment fiasco, with one member claiming the coalition is “fraudulent” and is “knowingly underpaying pharmacists for prescriptions they dispense.”

Saim Jetha, chief executive of pharmacy support group Avicenna, was speaking during the company’s conference in the Dominican Republic last week (May 26-June 2).

In remarks to a delegation at the Paradisus Hotel in Punta Cana which included independent pharmacists and industry figures such as Bharat Shah, managing director of Sigma Pharmaceuticals, Jetha revealed that Avicenna members had suffered prescription underpayments ranging from £400 to £4,500.

Pharmacists across England are paid by the NHS Business Services Authority (BSA) for the prescriptions they dispense, but many have been left underpaid by hundreds and, in some cases, thousands of pounds.

An NHS BSA survey last year revealed prescription payments were underpaid by an average of £4,224 between April 2009 and March 2011. Jetha told the conference: “Members are really unhappy about it. One mentioned that if he made a prescription error, he got a criminal record. He said: ‘These guys are fraudulent, knowingly underpaying us using a system that allows that.’”

Jetha said a recent meeting with pharmacy minister Earl Howe, where he was accompanied by Vince Cable, Liberal Democrat MP for Twickenham, failed to bring satisfactory answers.

“We took a different route. Vince Cable was very interested in what we said. He said we should be paid properly and he said he would write to Earl Howe.” Jetha said.

‘Cable’ then said: “No, instead we’ll have a face to face meeting with Earl Howe.”

In that meeting, Jetha sought answers to why pharmacists were not being paid back the money they were owed for the work they had carried out, why the pricing system was allowed to continue if it was not working properly and why prescription pricing data officers were not held to account.

Jetha added that the eventual response he received was a letter sent by Howe in the wake of the meeting in which he stated that pharmacists “should be paid accurately and on time and be able to check payments”.

Howe claimed that the NHS BSA “has implemented an extensive action plan” which had improved payment accuracy.

He added the government was committed to improving payment transparency “to understand what information (pharmacists) want to receive and how best (their) needs are met.”

But Jetha was unimpressed with Howe’s response and said he would email the pharmacy minister’s statement to every Avicenna member.

“I will collect all the Avicenna responses to his email and send it to him and see what is his response,” Jetha said.

He added that Howe had turned down his invitation to attend the major conference in the Dominican Republic.

The event in the Caribbean was designed to guide pharmacists through a challenging new NHS and help them raise their standards in patient health and social care.

NDTV launches new channel for British viewers

INDIAN lifestyle channel NDTV Good Times hosted a gala evening to announce its presence in the UK at an event in central London on May 23.

There was a surprise appearance by Bollywood composer Bappi Lahiri as well as a live cooking demonstration by chef Manish Mehrotra (pictured right), winner of the reality series, Foodistan.

Among those present at the celebration were State Bank of India’s regional head (UK) Mru-tyunjay Mahapatra, Virgin Media director of content and acquisition Emma Jones, vice president of Somersetland Abdurahman Abdillahi Ismail along with the CEO of Hero Honda Pawan Munjal.

Shibani Sharma khanna, channel director of NDTV Good Times and creative head of NDTV Lifestyle, added: “NDTV Good Times presents shows that touch upon different genres such as food, travel, fashion, music, technology and more.

The channel aims to offer world-class and aspirational programming that advocates living the Good Times.”

NDTV Good Times is available on Virgin channel 829.

Supermarket’s Asian range

MORRISONS is expanding its world food range with a range of Asian products.

Family staples such as 5kg and 10kg bags of rice from brands including Tilda and Laila as well as snacks will be stocked under new World Foods in 250 stores across the UK.

Morrisons is working with 60 new suppliers, many of whom are small firms, to bring the new World Food products to British consumers.

Included in the new range are 26 lines of fresh halal meat.

Nearly 200 non-food items, including cookware and Asian health and beauty brands will be available.

Noor Ali, lead ethnic buyer at Morrisons, said: “With shoppers leading busier lives, it’s important that they can find everything they need in one place. We have worked hard to ensure our offering reflects the communities’ needs.”