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**“Rather than be divided by who is the worst, the sector must be united in its determination to collectively be the best”**

The *Which?* report seems to have become community pharmacy's Groundhog Day, destined to be relived in all its discomfiting, affronting un-glory over and over again.

Five years on from the last, another mystery-shopping exercise has found that pharmacies gave unsatisfactory advisory in more than two fifths of visits (p4). So how do you react to this damning verdict?

You can – as some community pharmacy representatives have done, as they did in 2008 – point out that 122 pharmacies is only a small sample of the UK's 13,700 pharmacies. But the results still amount to 52 instances of pharmacies giving patients inadequate advice, which doesn't seem so insignificant if you think of it in terms of 52 patients whose health could have been adversely affected by shoddy service.

You can point out, as some did five years ago, that the investigation took place against a backdrop of cuts and rock-bottom morale – but the Francis report has shown that such arguments, however true, don't carry much weight when patients are the victims (even if the nature of the failures of care are worlds apart).

Or you can bristle at the intrusion on your professional patch and suggest, as one reader did back in 2008, that *Which?* hops on down to its local A&E department and assesses the performance of healthcare providers there. But surely it is right that a public service funded with taxpayer's money is subject to scrutiny?

As the branch manager of a large multiple, you could breathe a sigh of relief that they don't fare as badly in the 2013 investigation as independents and small multiples; as the manager of a supermarket pharmacy you could revel in coming out on top. And perhaps they are natural human reactions, so indulge your animal instincts for a moment. But only for a moment – because that is to underestimate the tarring effect that a minority of underperformers can have on the adequate or even excellent majority.

Rather than be divided by who is the worst, the sector must be united in its determination to collectively be the best. Rather than go on the defensive, better to take a deep breath and join those C+D readers who admitted on the website to being “embarrassed” by *Which?*'s findings and, even, that the report contained “no surprises” and would have produced similar findings even with a larger sample (join the debate at [tinyurl.com/cdwhich](http://tinyurl.com/cdwhich)).

Better still for everybody in the sector to consider how they can play their part, however small it seems, in making sure *Which?*'s mystery shoppers have nothing but praise next time they come round (because they will) – and then act on that consideration. That's how community pharmacy can escape its Groundhog Day.

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