

# 2018: THE TWISTS AND TURNS

*The main events in pharmacy throughout 2018, and a preview of the year ahead.*

DAWN CONNELLY

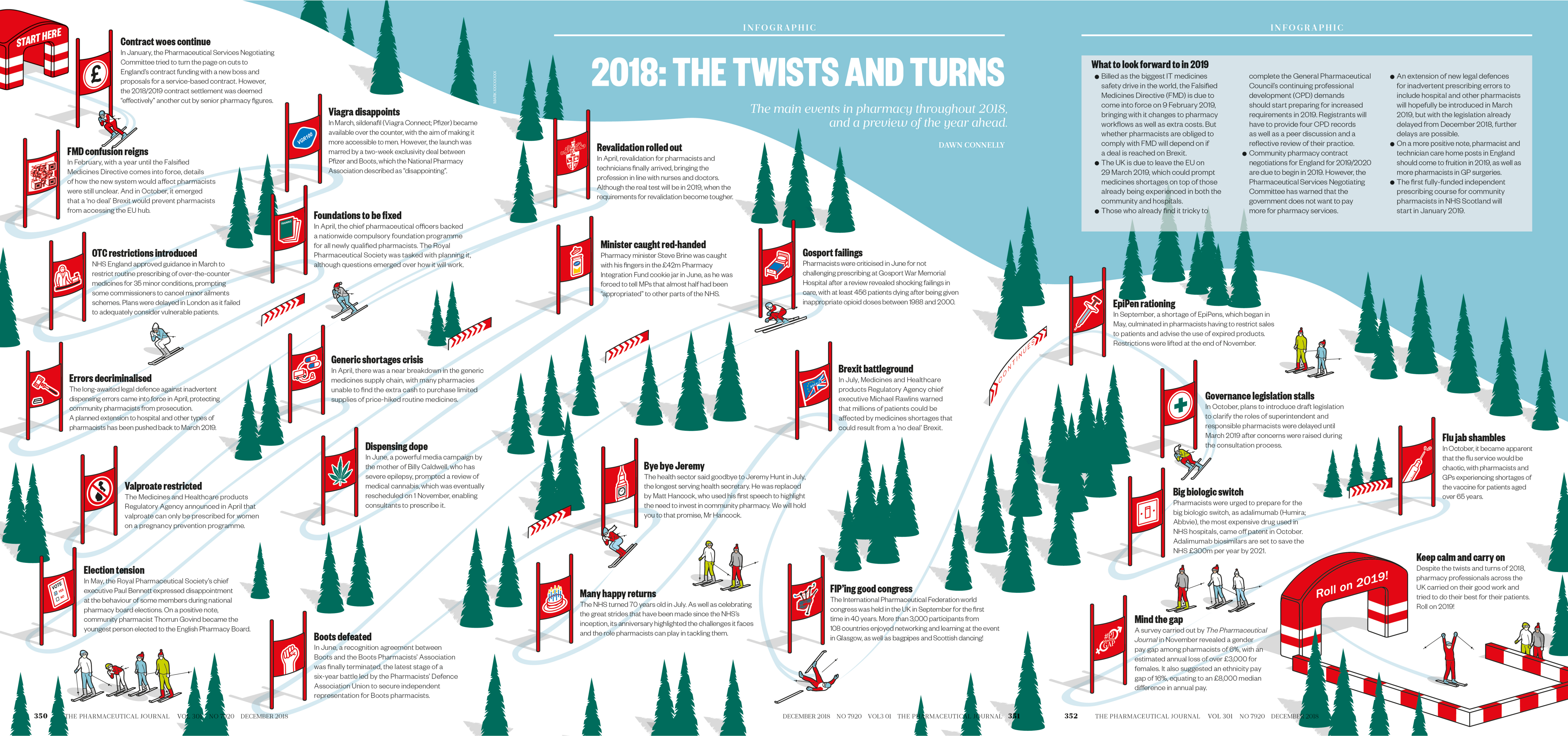
## What to look forward to in 2019

- Billed as the biggest IT medicines safety drive in the world, the Falsified Medicines Directive (FMD) is due to come into force on 9 February 2019, bringing with it changes to pharmacy workflows as well as extra costs. But whether pharmacists are obliged to comply with FMD will depend on if a deal is reached on Brexit.
- The UK is due to leave the EU on 29 March 2019, which could prompt medicines shortages on top of those already being experienced in both the community and hospitals.
- Those who already find it tricky to

complete the General Pharmaceutical Council's continuing professional development (CPD) demands should start preparing for increased requirements in 2019. Registrants will have to provide four CPD records as well as a peer discussion and a reflective review of their practice.

- Community pharmacy contract negotiations for England for 2019/2020 are due to begin in 2019. However, the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee has warned that the government does not want to pay more for pharmacy services.

- An extension of new legal defences for inadvertent prescribing errors to include hospital and other pharmacists will hopefully be introduced in March 2019, but with the legislation already delayed from December 2018, further delays are possible.
- On a more positive note, pharmacist and technician care home posts in England should come to fruition in 2019, as well as more pharmacists in GP surgeries.
- The first fully-funded independent prescribing course for community pharmacists in NHS Scotland will start in January 2019.



## Contract woes continue

In January, the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee tried to turn the page on cuts to England's contract funding with a new boss and proposals for a service-based contract. However, the 2018/2019 contract settlement was deemed "effectively" another cut by senior pharmacy figures.

## FMD confusion reigns

In February, with a year until the Falsified Medicines Directive comes into force, details of how the new system would affect pharmacists were still unclear. And in October, it emerged that a 'no deal' Brexit would prevent pharmacists from accessing the EU hub.

## OTC restrictions introduced

NHS England approved guidance in March to restrict routine prescribing of over-the-counter medicines for 35 minor conditions, prompting some commissioners to cancel minor ailments schemes. Plans were delayed in London as it failed to adequately consider vulnerable patients.

## Errors decriminalised

The long-awaited legal defence against inadvertent dispensing errors came into force in April, protecting community pharmacists from prosecution. A planned extension to hospital and other types of pharmacists has been pushed back to March 2019.

## Valproate restricted

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency announced in April that valproate can only be prescribed for women on a pregnancy prevention programme.

## Election tension

In May, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's chief executive Paul Bennett expressed disappointment at the behaviour of some members during national pharmacy board elections. On a positive note, community pharmacist Thorun Govind became the youngest person elected to the English Pharmacy Board.

## Viagra disappoints

In March, sildenafil (Viagra Connect; Pfizer) became available over the counter, with the aim of making it more accessible to men. However, the launch was marred by a two-week exclusivity deal between Pfizer and Boots, which the National Pharmacy Association described as "disappointing".

## Foundations to be fixed

In April, the chief pharmaceutical officers backed a nationwide compulsory foundation programme for all newly qualified pharmacists. The Royal Pharmaceutical Society was tasked with planning it, although questions emerged over how it will work.

## Generic shortages crisis

In April, there was a near breakdown in the generic medicines supply chain, with many pharmacies unable to find the extra cash to purchase limited supplies of price-hiked routine medicines.

## Dispensing dope

In June, a powerful media campaign by the mother of Billy Caldwell, who has severe epilepsy, prompted a review of medical cannabis, which was eventually rescheduled on 1 November, enabling consultants to prescribe it.

## Revalidation rolled out

In April, revalidation for pharmacists and technicians finally arrived, bringing the profession in line with nurses and doctors. Although the real test will be in 2019, when the requirements for revalidation become tougher.

## Minister caught red-handed

Pharmacy minister Steve Brine was caught with his fingers in the £42m Pharmacy Integration Fund cookie jar in June, as he was forced to tell MPs that almost half had been "appropriated" to other parts of the NHS.

## Gosport failings

Pharmacists were criticised in June for not challenging prescribing at Gosport War Memorial Hospital after a review revealed shocking failings in care, with at least 456 patients dying after being given inappropriate opioid doses between 1988 and 2000.

## Brexit battleground

In July, Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency chief executive Michael Rawlins warned that millions of patients could be affected by medicines shortages that could result from a 'no deal' Brexit.

## Bye bye Jeremy

The health sector said goodbye to Jeremy Hunt in July, the longest serving health secretary. He was replaced by Matt Hancock, who used his first speech to highlight the need to invest in community pharmacy. We will hold you to that promise, Mr Hancock.

## Many happy returns

The NHS turned 70 years old in July. As well as celebrating the great strides that have been made since the NHS's inception, its anniversary highlighted the challenges it faces and the role pharmacists can play in tackling them.

## FIP'ing good congress

The International Pharmaceutical Federation world congress was held in the UK in September for the first time in 40 years. More than 3,000 participants from 108 countries enjoyed networking and learning at the event in Glasgow, as well as bagpipes and Scottish dancing!

## EpiPen rationing

In September, a shortage of EpiPens, which began in May, culminated in pharmacists having to restrict sales to patients and advise the use of expired products. Restrictions were lifted at the end of November.

## Governance legislation stalls

In October, plans to introduce draft legislation to clarify the roles of superintendent and responsible pharmacists were delayed until March 2019 after concerns were raised during the consultation process.

## Big biologic switch

Pharmacists were urged to prepare for the big biologic switch, as adalimumab (Humira; Abbvie), the most expensive drug used in NHS hospitals, came off patent in October. Adalimumab biosimilars are set to save the NHS £300m per year by 2021.

## Mind the gap

A survey carried out by *The Pharmaceutical Journal* in November revealed a gender pay gap among pharmacists of 6%, with an estimated annual loss of over £3,000 for females. It also suggested an ethnicity pay gap of 16%, equating to an £8,000 median difference in annual pay.

## Flu jab shambles

In October, it became apparent that the flu service would be chaotic, with pharmacists and GPs experiencing shortages of the vaccine for patients aged over 65 years.

## Keep calm and carry on

Despite the twists and turns of 2018, pharmacy professionals across the UK carried on their good work and tried to do their best for their patients. Roll on 2019!