Evolutionary approaches to the concept of drift in policy studies

Within the important seam of policy studies dedicated to understanding how institutions and policies change over time, attention is increasingly being paid to cataloguing patterns of change in the absence of 'big' reform (Béland 2007, 2010; Béland, Rocco and Waddan 2016). The ambition is to explain policy change by reference to factors which are endogenous to the institution or policy as a counterpoint to accounts that rely on exogenous shocks as correlates of observed 'big' changes. The concept of policy drift set out in Hacker (2004; 2005) has been widely referenced in this line of work as an intuitively appealing label for an empirical pattern seemingly observed across many different policy sectors: 'changes in the operation or effect of policies that occur without significant changes in those policies' structure' (Hacker 2004, 246). Whilst the policy does not change, its consequences do as the external environments in which the apparently stable policy operates shifts gradually.

Although evolutionary approaches are not explicitly acknowledged in this line of inquiry, in this paper we argue that they have much to contribute. First, evolutionary thinking helps clarify drift as a distinct concept from those which are often co-listed as competitors for the analysis of cumulative, sub-surface and endogenous policy change: displacement, layering, conversion or exhaustion (Wincott 2013). Second, an evolutionary approach casts light on the role of agency in drift sequences, something poorly understood and articulated in the drift literature (Shpaizman 2017; Rocco 2017). It remains unclear whether policy drift should be understood as something caused directly by a political strategy employed by an influential policy actor, or, rather, as a policy sequence that is unintended by any particular actor in the policy process. This paper presents the argument, using an evolutionary metaphor, that it is the latter, leaving an important but necessarily separate question of the agency of policy actors: to recognise their interests in, and capacity to develop, appropriate responses to the consequences of policy drift. The third contribution of the evolutionary metaphor is to this question of agency: it extends the existing drift literature beyond a simple dichotomy of maintaining or reversing drift by identifying acclimatisation and adaptation as distinct agential responses to drift in the policy environment.

The paper is structured to develop the argument that the nascent literature on evolutionary approaches in policy studies can help bolster our understanding of drift. The first section outlines, in brief and introductory terms, the application of evolutionary thinking to public

policy. The next section contributes to our analytical repertoire for drift patterns by using an evolutionary metaphor for drift to develop a three-step analytical framework to highlight limitations in the existing drift literature on questions of agency. The penultimate part of the paper develops the case of pharmaceutical services policy in the UK to illustrate empirically the value of this analytical framework for the application of the concept of drift in policy studies. The concluding section discusses the key points raised in the paper for future research into policy drift.

EVOLUTIONARY APPROACHES IN POLICY STUDIES

Although the terms 'evolution' and 'evolutionary' are widely used in the social sciences, for the most part they are employed as convenient short hands for slow and gradual change over time. To introduce evolutionary thinking more analytically into policy studies, evolution can usefully be stated as a descriptive label, or metaphor, for a process of change as distinct from biological evolution as a theory of change (John 1999; Kerr 2002; Cairney 2013). By doing so, one of the main criticism of evolutionary approaches in the social sciences - that biological analogies in the social world are misleading because there are no equivalents of natural selection in society - can be avoided. Instead, evolutionary perspectives are something useful for the analysis of all open, complex systems, of which natural systems are an important but not unique example (Campbell 1965).

The idea of punctuated change has had a strong grip on thinking about evolution as a process in the political world of policy-making (Cairney 2013). For example, workhorse models of the dynamics of public policy by Kingdon (1984, 1993) and Baumgartner and Jones (1993, 2002, 2009) have used the notion of punctuated change; there are moments, windows or critical junctures where change is observed. Although these do not represent a full evolutionary theory or a detailed and contextualised application of evolutionary concepts in the social sciences, they do acknowledge their borrowings from evolutionary biology.

Evolution serves well as a metaphor in policy studies. The claim that frameworks or theories act as metaphors often implies weakness and a lack of substance. However, as recent philosophers of social science have noted, metaphors can have a deeply constitutive, if subterranean presence, in the formation of concepts and analysis of change (Lakoff and Johnson 2003; Lewis 1996; Klamer and Leonard 1994). Indeed, metaphors are prior to any analogy; they establish broad and general mappings across conceptual domains and help structure understanding and assist in the perception of connections between different things.

In turn, this supports the formation of concepts to organise things into different categories. (Lakoff and Johnson 2003).

In terms of existing studies of policy dynamics, evolutionary metaphors are a useful way of organising thinking about agency in a shifting policy environment by distinguishing two distinct processes: acclimatisation (learning by agents as they update their calculations about how to realise interests most effectively) and adaptation where agents' beliefs, identities, and interests are learned or constructed in their interaction with other agents and the broader policy environment in a process of self-organisation . In terms of adaptation, the literature on discursive institutionalism - although not explicitly evolutionary - is useful in highlighting how normative and cognitive change may occur as the problem situation itself is reconstructed and reframed in the interaction between agents and their environment (e.g. Carstensen 2015). This separate identification of adaptation in drift is a useful step in developing understanding the role of the agency in drift sequences that have not been reversed. Just as policy problems, policy solutions and criteria of 'success' or 'failure' are all constructed (Marsh and McConnell 2010), so recognition of drift and deliberation on its consequences underpin agent intentions to react to drift. Kaufman (1993, 644) argues that analysis of these sorts of dynamics of self-organisation should complement consideration of selection mechanisms in evolutionary thinking. In terms of a policy studies metaphor, the role of agents in evolution is not just *ad hoc* fiddling or myopic bricolage; rather it involves acclimatisation as well as adaptation as attitudes, beliefs and strategies change in the policy process as an emergent order from the operation of selection mechanisms, which operate to support or retard development of new policy interests, normative and cognitive ideas and strategies. This helps extend understand of the different forms of agency in drift sequences beyond simple reversal; a recognised gap in the drift literature (Shpaizman 2017; Rocco 2017).

EVOLUTIONARY APPROACHES TO THE CONCEPT OF DRIFT

Evolutionary approaches in the social sciences have often been elided with criticisms of functionalism (Kincaid 1996). To circumvent this criticism requires describing selection mechanism that do not operate in a way that 'selects' behaviours or institutions that produce *favourable* consequences for some agent as that would amount to functionalism. This presents the dilemma of wanting an evolutionary metaphor to have some analytical value but also avoid functionalism. Kerr (2002) asserts that institutions or behaviours or ideas that have

consequences which are beyond the 'strict limits or 'selective' pressures' (Kerr 2002, 351) set by the environment will not tend to occur. As a result, 'this forces individual actors or groups of agents to negotiate, and 'adapt' to, the context in which they are situated.'

The basic argument is that because dysfunctional elements tend to disappear, persisting forms can be assumed to be adapted in the sense of not being dysfunctional. It amounts essentially to the assertion that non-dysfunctional institutions maintain themselves over time, because they do not transgress environmental limits or constraints. Some might see this position as vulnerable because there may be many non-dysfunctional alternatives to a given dysfunctional institution. Without the ability to say which of them will emerge, and at what time, rather than simply that one of them ultimately will, the predictive capacity of an evolutionary theory is limited. In terms of explanatory power, evolutionary theory is anaemic without functionalism.

However, there is good reason for this lack of explanatory power. The ambition for dynamic theories of public policy is for theories, methods and concepts to produce intelligible narratives that involve highly contingent combinations of factors, and not universal theory of all policy change. In terms of evolutionary theory, there may be different selection pressures operating at different levels and over different time horizons. There is no single uniform and universal mechanism that uniquely selects and that can be accounted for by a covering law theory. Instead, there is a multitude of overlapping and potentially conflicting environmental pressures over the short, intermediate and long term that possibly change the impact of a public policy absent any formal policy change.

The notion of selection as environmental pressure that produces a disposition or a tendency is similar to contemporary understanding of selection in the field of complex systems and evolutionary economics (Potts 2000; Dopfer 2012; Hodgson 2014). In these terms, selection mechanisms are not universal fields that operate consistently over time but rather are often local, relative and operate over a specific period. Thus within the environment of the policy system there are dispositions, tendencies and constraints that limit what policy or policy proposal or idea or advocacy coalition (and so on) may be successful.

Drift contributes initially to understanding policy change over time by bringing selection pressures - reinforcements and reactions - to the fore in a critique of the conventional account of stability in policy studies. This is the argument that institutions and policies maintain themselves over time because they do not set up large endogenous pressures for change, or,

in other words, they are functional. On this account, stability and functionality are in a constitutive relationship in public policy: functionality is an essential and necessary characteristic of any stable policy.

The drift concept can be used to cast doubt on this argument in several respects. First, the basic insight of the stability account, that non-dysfunctional institutions and policy remain stable over time, is dubious: apparently stable policy may well be subject to drift. Second, even if dysfunctional institutions and policy do tend to disappear in the policy-making system because of some selection mechanism operating in the policy environment, there is no presumption that they will be replaced by stable, functional ones unless we can discover empirically a selection mechanism that winnows out dysfunctional institutions.

In general, the policy drift literature honours the Hacker (2004, 2005) account as seminal in the field; see Hacker and Pierson 2010, 2011; and for extensions, see Streeck and Thelen 2005; Béland 2007, 2010; Mahoney and Thelen 2009; Falleti and Lynch 2009; Hacker, Pierson and Thelen, 2013; van der Heijden, 2010; Shpaizman 2016, 2017; Rocco 2017. Here, for drift to be applied accurately 'requires identifying areas where social and economic changes have altered the effects of policies, where alternatives on the political agenda would reverse those effects, and where the power of intense organized interests or pivotally situated veto players leads those alternatives to be rejected' (Hacker and Pierson 2010, 271-272).

The Hacker account has developed over time in its account of the role of agency in drift. The initial formulation, that drift is the incremental transformation of stable policy arrangements because of shifting socioeconomic circumstances and the lack of major legislative actions to address them, has firmed to, 'Drift occurs when formal rules are deliberately held constant in the face of major environmental shifts, causing their outcomes to change' (Hacker, Thelen and Pierson 2013, 2).

This is a somewhat narrower version of agency than previous descriptions of drift in terms of failure, where - for example - 'Drift describes the politically driven failure of public policies to adapt to the shifting realities of a dynamic economy and society. Drift is not the same as simple inaction. Rather, it occurs when the effects of public policies change due to shifts in the surrounding economic or social context and then, despite the recognition of alternatives, policy makers fail to update policies due to pressure from intense minority interests or political actors exploiting veto points in the political process' (Hacker & Pierson 2010, 170).

Recognising and responding to drift

In a critical response to John's (1999) arguments in favour of introducing evolutionary theories into political science, Dowding (2000, 75) makes a distinction between evolutionary explanations and intentional explanation, that 'specifying any non-intentional selection mechanism by which policies are generated may be called "evolutionary explanation'. This distinction immediately limits evolutionary thinking in policy studies. Intentional actions are set out as not part of evolutionary theory, which instead is reduced to conjunctural contingencies, unintended consequences and environmental selection pressures in terms of mechanisms to make sense of events and processes in policy making.

One way to accommodate selection and intentionality is through the concept of artificial selection, although on the Dowding distinction this is not evolutionary. The essential characteristic of artificial versus natural selection is that humans manipulate the criteria or environment of selection (i.e. it is intentional selection). However, the introduction of intentionality in this way raises familiar questions in policy studies of the processes of cognitive and cultural evolution that explain why agents come to act in the way that they do.

Intentional selection mechanisms have been introduced into policy theory; particularly in the voluminous body of work that pushes analysis beyond the stages ideal of policy-making. In Kingdon's (1984, 1995) influential multiple streams approach, different policy solutions enter at the initiation stage of policy, often taken from the 'garbage can' or 'policy soup' and are fitted by policy entrepreneurs to problems that 'float by'. There are selection pressures that filter out or fail to select certain policies; from backbenchers in the legislature, from different departments, from the electorate, the media or policy networks.

The Hacker version of drift holds that a fragmented institutional context is a contributory background driver in the observed status quo bias in policy making. Institutional context matters for drift both in terms of the formal institutions of the political system as well as the more informal institutions at the level of the policy itself. However, the literature has not yet systematically examined drift in non-US contexts or investigated the design features necessary to promote policy updating to reverse drift in the face of changing circumstances in the policy environment. Analysis is still in its infancy, for example, about automaticity: the degree to which policies and their instruments are set thermostatically to change automatically in response to specified environmental shifts (Hacker, Pierson and Thelen 2013, 22).

Some of the existing literature on drift leaves open the question of the extent to which drift is intentional or not, while other recent work (Shpaizman 2016, 2017) seems to imply that drift only occurs when actors block attempts to update policies in line with changing socioeconomic circumstances. We argue that responses to drift should be clearly separated from drift itself; drift may occur even without any observations of blocked attempts to reverse it.

A policy drift framework: reversal, acclimatisation and adaptation

The evolutionary metaphor offers a more general framework for analysing drift sequences as *three identifiable stages*, with two decision points. The first stage is whether it is realised that drift is occurring; if it is not recognised then discussion of agency stops there. However, if it is recognised then there are two options for policy-makers – either to correct the drift or not. If correction is sought by policy-makers, then this leads to the third phase and second decision point – how to respond. Political strategies to reverse drift remain poorly articulated at present in the literature; how those interests involved in the origins of a policy protect their gains against subsequent drift has not yet attracted sustained scholarship (Shpaizman 2017; Rocco 2017). The focus in this paper is the situation where drift is recognised but not corrected. This refers to the idea of drift as intentional inaction, and this is the theme in Hacker's later work with Thelen and Pierson: 'Drift occurs when formal rules are deliberately held constant in the face of major environmental shifts, causing their outcomes to change' (Hacker, Thelen and Pierson 2013, 2). As we have argued above, analysis of intentional inaction in failing to reverse drift still requires an account of agency in the on-going drift sequence. We suggest acclimatisation and adaptation as valuable contributions inspired by an evolutionary approach in this endeavour.

The evolutionary metaphor animates the framework by first encouraging the description of drift as the unintended, and perhaps not observable, changes in policy consequences over time and then placing the burden of analysis on whether phenomenon is recognised and then contested, with agents enjoying varying power or influence to reverse or maintain. The first part of the formulation is about changing environmental selection pressures in the evolutionary metaphor; and the second part, about intentional selection mechanisms as agents contest the different consequences of drift and seek to establish feedback loops to *reverse* the drift sequence; or alternatively accept the drift sequence and attempt to *acclimatise*; or, as a

further alternate, where agents interact in a process of self-organisation to *adapt* in a longer-term sense to the on-going drift sequence.

In seeking to develop understanding of agency in drift sequences, the evolutionary metaphor facilitates understanding of the possibility that drift consequences may serve, but are not intentionally caused by, the political and policy interests of some actors. This is the case when barriers to 'big' reform exist at the policy system or paradigm level. The relationship between allowing drift as a change strategy versus alternatives such as long-term policy advocacy, entrepreneurship, or lobbying in favour of a 'big bang' reform has yet to be explored fully.

Throughout the drift literature, the status quo bias of the broader political and policy-making system is the backdrop to agency of policy actors, their capacity to reform or replace a policy. This bias is interpreted as the result of the interaction between the set of preferences constituted by the different actors and the institutional rules that enable and constrain their interactions. The evolutionary metaphor helps reveal that the status quo bias may be illusory; the apparently stable policy and its consequences may be drifting gradually, and where agency may be characterised as acclimatisation or adaptation.

The three-stage drift framework also presents the question of recognition of consequences of unintended policy change: do individuals, or groups of individuals, recognise the costs or benefits that accrue from policy drift? In a world of media distorted communication, this is not just an academic complication; rather, it is something we may speculate as sitting at the heart of the contemporary politics of policy-making. It is beyond the scope of this paper but noteworthy that in the emerging literatures on success and failure in policy attempts have been made to pin down the possible disjunction between benefit and recognition of benefit in several heuristics that allow policy success to be accompanied by political failure.

Although they may not have been involved politically at the origin of a policy in the initial decision to enact a policy design, the feedback role of new actors is crucial in the distribution of power to either sustain or reverse a policy drift pattern from which they benefit or lose. Furthermore, different policy actors brought into a policy drift pattern because of changing policy effects may not just operate on a single maintain-reverse dimension and, instead, may employ various strategies to reframe policy. This is particularly important at the first and second order levels of policy change, where the costs of overturning an established policy paradigm are prohibitive but there are opportunities in debates and contests on instruments

and their settings to extend or shrink the gap between the originating and extant paradigm and the reality of the goals and effects of the instruments employed.

CASE STUDY: UK PHARMACEUTICAL SERVICES POLICY 1911-2000

The evolutionary metaphor helps to build on the Hacker version of policy drift by elaborating the means for an applied policy analysis of the phenomenon: how inaction may serve to diminish gradually the effectiveness of government programmes over time by failing to 'correct course' and update policy in response to variations in its reproduction or shifts in the wider socioeconomic environment. The existing description of a drift process in terms of serial, static and one-off vetoes may be extended to capture additional forms of agency – acclimatisation and adaptation - in underlying drift process.

However, policy inaction is often 'difficult-to-see', and creates challenges for empirical scholarship. As discussed above, Hacker's original account of drift has developed and evolved to argument that drift occurs when policies are *deliberately* held constant in the face of major environmental shifts, which results in the effectiveness of incumbent policies changing (Hacker et al 2013, 2). In this version, drift is not simple inaction. As described in the previous section, the evolutionary metaphor offered in the paper develops this insight a step further such that drift may be identified in a framework of three identifiable stages, with two decision points. The first stage is the realisation that drift is occurring. The consequences of policy may have changed due to shifts in the encompassing economic or social context or through chance variations in the reproduction of the policy.

To clearly articulate how this framework is useful in analysing drift, we present the example of National Health Service (NHS) pharmaceutical policy and the decisions on whether to reform the current arrangements for prescribing and dispensing drugs. This example not only provides evidence for the suitability of our three-stage model, but shows how policy actors not involved politically at the origin of a policy may still sustain beneficial policy drift and acclimatise. Further, vested interest groups have adapted to drift and are currently employing various strategies to reframe government pharmacy policy and to increase the political costs of any big reforms.

Current NHS policy stipulates separate roles for the prescribers and the dispensers of medicines. This is not unusual as a policy choice. In many countries worldwide, doctors

prescribe drugs and pharmacists dispense the items requested. However, this structural division is not the only organisational arrangement possible. For instance, doctors may self-dispense the products they choose (Baines, Tolley and Whynes 1996). Similarly, all pharmacists could become prescribers and cease in their dispensing role (Gilbert 1998). Because alternative arrangements are feasible but not enacted (Baines 2015a), we suggest that the prescribing-dispensing example illustrates the utility of the drift concept in interrogating gradual but cumulative change.

As noted in the analytical framework, the nature of a drift process - gradual, cumulative, episodes of non-change - make it less than straightforward to capture empirically. We offer the following necessary conditions to support observations of policy drift:

(i)   A changing economic and/or social context needs to be described that creates over time unrealized benefits that could be secured through reform intervention in the drift process. In our example, we cite the consensus that switching pharmacist roles from medicines supply to the provision of services would greatly benefit patient health and well-being.

(ii)   A counterfactual must be identified that makes the relevant policy alternative 'easy-to-conceptualise' and plausible for policy-makers; that is, it must reflect a recognised policy alternative avoided by policy makers. As an example, we choose the freeing of the majority of pharmacist time from dispensing to becoming the providers of services to patients.

(iii)   Evidence is required that minority interests or political actors are exploiting veto points in the political process to stop significant reform and maintain the drift. In our example, we suggest that the groups that represent the commercial interests of pharmacy owners have adapted to the drift sequence.

(iv)   A check should to be made to ensure that drift is not confused with an observation simple inaction nor a simple chance process. In our example, we argue that policy inaction was a dominant feature of NHS pharmacy policy before 2000, but this was replaced with a period of policy drift under the Labour government modernisation programme at the turn of the century in which major actors acclimatised.

Changing economic and/or social context

In the last thirty years, the economic and social context of publicly-funded health services has changed significantly (Navarro et al 2006). Growing populations accompanied by ever-increasing costs have made health systems, such as the NHS, more aware of the need to prioritise care provision (Savedoff et al 2012). There has a been a move away from funding clinical areas and professions towards funding patient services and outcomes (Beney, Bero and Bond 2000), with the ring-fencing of monies for professional groups such as pharmacists gradually becoming an unacceptable policy choice. At the system-wide level, stable health policy settings have had gradually different fiscal consequences and produced policy arguments for moving pharmacists into non-dispensing roles.

With our current example, there is also an applied policy analysis logic for dismantling the prescribing-dispensing split as a policy instrument for controlling doctor expenditure on medicines. Although the artificial split between prescribers and dispensers may have been the best way of controlling doctor profiteering during the twentieth century, the world has changed significantly since that time. The widespread availability of mainframe, personal and cloud computing has made the monitoring of prescribing behaviour much easier (Baines 2014). Therefore, budgets, incentives and penalties are simpler to introduce, monitor and use, which makes the prescribing-dispensing model redundant as a primary cost control mechanism (Baines, Whynes and Tolley 1997). Similarly, the introduction of robotic and automated dispensing systems minimises the need for pharmacist involvement in the supply process. Therefore, the current system could be dismantled without any reasonable concerns about escalating drug costs or significant extra costs of dispensing.

As well as a changing economic context, there are social reasons why pharmacist dispensing could be ceased by significant reforms. Since the mid-1980s, there has been social change and accompanying re-examination of the role of pharmacists in the medical marketplace (Rosenthal et al 2011). To maintain their relevance in modern health systems, the pharmacy profession has become increasingly aware of the pressure to offer value-added services rather than remain the passive dispensers of drugs (Tan et al 2015). From the mid-1990s onwards, there has been a growing belief that the future of pharmacy lays with providing such services, which the profession commonly refers to "pharmaceutical care" (van Mil, Schulz and Tromp 2004).

Policy drift produced greater pressure on cash-limited health budgets and social change as attitudes to professional status and dispensing with pharmaceutical care shifted (FIP 2012). Reform options exist to reverse the policy drift to release untapped patients benefits by shifting pharmacists, on mass, away from medicines supply to be employed to provide interventions directly to patients (Mossialos et al 2015). In the UK, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB), which represents the profession, has spent over thirty years promoting an extension of pharmacist roles to government policy-makers. Notably, the RPSGB launched its *Pharmacy In A New Age* (PIANA) initiative in September 1995 and continued until early in 1999, just before the Labour government launched its 2000 national plan (Baines 2015b).

Reflecting upon the campaign, Longley (2006) reported that PIANA was a conscious attempt to produce a vision for pharmacy that had a chance of being funded by the government. PIANA was not to promote big reforms that would divide the profession and challenge the government, but to promote incrementalism because "it could be seen that various individual policy initiatives added up to a better future". In 2000, the outcomes of the RSPGB initiative shaped the vision for pharmacy introduced as part of the Labour government's modernisation plans (DoH, 1997). This marked a critical juncture in pharmacy policy, where the long period of simple inaction was replaced by an extended period of policy drift.

Identifiable counterfactual

When other options are available, a counterfactual may be formulated that represents the next best alternative to the existing arrangements (Tetlock and Belkin 1996). In the case of the prescribing-dispensing model, the next best alternative depends upon the policy objective desired. For instance, a non-dispensing role for pharmacists could lead to a wider range of service offerings being available for patients (Nkansah et al, 2010). In response, our chosen counterfactual is NHS pharmacists in England performing a non-dispensing role, focusing primarily on the provision of medicines-related services for patients. This is a counterfactual because it represents a viable policy alternative that has never been fully pursued, and thus acts as an indicator of policy drift.

Because government pharmaceutical policy fixes the profession as medicines suppliers, pharmacists in England are not, in theory, as effective as they could be in terms of generating benefits for patients and reducing avoidable drug errors. This situation was recognised formally by the pharmacy profession in England as early as the mid-1980s and became a

leading vision for the profession internationally during the early-1990s (Turner 1986; Hepler and Strand 1990). The abolition of the prescribing-dispensing model is an example of recognised policy alternative avoided by policy makers. The importance of non-dispensing activities for the profession has been consistently recognised by pharmacy leaders in England as preferable to the existing arrangements, which policy-makers have failed to dismantle with reforms (Berenguer et al 2004). Government policy makers clearly understand that policy reform could end the dispensing role for pharmacy.

Vetoing policy change and adaptation to drift

Applying our three-stage analytical framework to establish the existence of policy drift requires evidence that minority interests or political actors are exploiting veto points in the political process to stop large-scale reform. Within the pharmacist professional network in England, there is widespread acceptance that the dispensing role is unnecessary. Overnight, large-scale government reforms could reduce the involvement of the pharmacy profession in dispensing. However, political pressure from commercial interests has meant that the requisite reforms have not occurred because of fears that the owners of pharmacy premises will lose millions of pounds in NHS revenues if their supply role disappears. Therefore, pharmacy policy since 2000 has been an incremental process of increasing the profession's involvement in pharmaceutical care and service provision. Pharmacy policy in England may be described as policy drift because of the political veto of big reforms from interests in the existing prescribing-dispensing system. Despite opposition from commercial interests in the profession, few doubt that a reduction in supply activities would free substantial amounts of pharmacist time, which could be used to provide services for patients. These services could help rationalise medicines use, reduce drug errors and support local primary care providers. Therefore, evidence suggest that the absence of big bang reforms has allowed a drift process, and a sub-optimal policy, to endure.

In 2013, the Royal Pharmaceutical report, *Now or Never: Shaping Pharmacy for the Future,* acknowledged that little progress had been made since 2000. Incremental government policies had done little to introduce new models of care that could make real the pharmacy's vision for pharmaceutical care. Instead, most pharmacists remained adapted to their dispensing role in a policy drift sequence, unable to use their skills elsewhere in the NHS due to a lack of leadership and integration. In other words, major policy actors were adapted in a policy drift sequence that was creating sub-optimal policy outcomes. Evidence of this is the

lack of a policy agenda around the reallocation of investments in pharmacist-led dispensing could free funds to spend elsewhere in the NHS. An agential process of acclimatization would allow debate about the costs and benefits of redirecting current dispensing monies to other means of reimbursing pharmacists, but the nature of adaptation is revealed in the consistent and organised professional resistance to pharmaceutical reforms involvimg novel remuneration models.

Not policy inaction or simple chance

In the UK, the architects of the NHS inherited arrangements for pharmaceutical provision introduced in the *National Insurance Act* in 1911. This was salient reform event because the policy was introduced simultaneously across the whole UK for all patients and all primary care doctors (except those in rural areas not near a dispensing chemist). Despite major reforms in 1974, 1982, 1991, 2000 and 2010, the arrangements for prescribing and dispensing still remain structurally unchanged (Carrier and Kendall 2015). Although over 100 years old, the system of reimbursing pharmacists for medicines prescribed by doctors, with an associated fee for dispensing, has not altered. Given the significant volume of policy discussions, evaluations and changes that have occurred in the history of the NHS, the policy inaction over the structure of pharmaceutical services was not a chance event. There has been a constant awareness that the separation of prescribers and dispensers is a robust organisational structure that successfully gives patients ready access to medicines and allows the government to easily reimburse pharmaceutical supply. Therefore, there was policy inaction between 1948 and 2000 because the government's objective was the safe supply of medicines and not the re-professionalisation of pharmacists.

Evidence suggests that there was a critical juncture in NHS pharmaceutical policy in 2000. Before this time, successive governments aimed their policies at prescribers not dispensers because their primary policy objective was to control the ever-growing drugs bill. Throughout this time, the policy logic was simple: doctors prescribe the drugs that cost money, therefore all policy must be aimed at them. No government questioned whether the prescriber-dispenser split was the optimal arrangement. Similarly, before 2000, there was little talk of extended roles for pharmacists because it was commonly assumed that they were busy with dispensing. Therefore, there were only minor policy changes aimed at pharmacy, mostly concerned with commercial issues such as the number and locations of pharmacies, the procedures for reimbursing dispensers and professional fees (Baines et al 2003). By the

mid-1980s, pharmacists were becoming increasingly aware that these highly-focused incremental changes were limiting the growth opportunities for the profession to the detriment of both practitioners and patients.

In 2000, for the first time in the history of the NHS, pharmacy became a major policy concern. With the new millennium, the Labour government promised to modernise the NHS, including pharmacy services. As part of its modernisation agenda, Labour launched *Pharmacy in the Future – implementing the NHS Plan* (Department of Health 2000). The document outlined a series of initiatives designed to give patients better access to pharmacy services and to help them use their medicines more effectively. The Labour government promised to: end the postcode lottery in the prescription of cancer drugs; introduce electronic prescribing by 2004; reward pharmacists for their involvement in the management of medicines management and repeats; advise GPs on cost effective prescribing for nicotine replacement therapy; promote better aspirin and statin use. Despite the intention to modernise, these initiatives were incremental changes not big reforms. Prescribing doctors and dispensing pharmacists were still separated physically, organisationally, professionally and financially. Therefore, the 2000 modernisation did not do enough to address the fundamental flaw in the design of NHS pharmaceutical services (Baines 2015c). This was a missed opportunity to reverse the 1913 decision to divide pharmaceutical services into two separate camps: prescribing doctors and dispensing pharmacists.

Additionally, in observations of drift, it is necessary to eliminate chance effects. The arrangements for NHS pharmaceutical services introduced in1948 were based upon those put in place for the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) in 1913 (Baines, 2013). Before this time, family doctors were free to self-dispense the medicines they recommended to patients. Under the NIS, doctors on the local panel (that is, on the list of NIS providers) had to write prescriptions for demanded items, which could only be cashed at local pharmacies on the local panel list. As a result, pharmacists began to supply most of the medicines insured patients required. The prescribing-dispensing system was introduced because the Liberal government believed that doctors would over-prescribed to generate higher incomes if they were allocated a dispensing role. As the NIS created a large-scale change in existing arrangements, the allocation of dispensing to pharmacists was a big policy reform. The belief that dispensing doctors may over-prescribed has some supporting evidence and so the choice of the prescribing-dispensing model may have been rational (Shafie et al 2012.).

CONCLUSION

The previous section of the paper presented a case study of the policy drift concept as one of the gradual but consequential types of changes that are currently being catalogued as policy studies moves slowly beyond a stability versus 'big' change dualism in its analysis of change. In the paper, we have argued that drift is a richer concept for engaging with evolutionary thinking. In particular, it helps support conceptual work on both selection mechanisms in policy change as well as identifying the importance of the political and policy consequences of dysfunctions between policy structures, their effects and selection pressures operating in the broader policy environment.

From an evolutionary perspective on policy drift, discussions of reform strategies need to be supplemented by the acknowledgement that the target us moving; the policy system is changing – perhaps even reforming – through incremental accumulation of uncoordinated actions and the consequences of changing socio-economic contexts. This helps show that policy actors do not just confront inertia or stasis, as usually stated in certain strands of the new institutionalism literature, but also the problem of dynamism as captured by the concept of policy drift.

As our case study illustrates, policy drift is a useful concept for capturing how maintaining drift is not a passive agential process but rather one that involves acclimatisation and/or adaptation to the drift sequence. These fresh extensions to understanding agency in the drift literature presented by the evolutionary metaphor support apprehending the dynamic nature of changes in the policy environment as well as revealing how the drift process itself drifts; there are no stable relationships between policy settings, the policy environment and the agency of actors. The associated variations in the combined operation of policy selection mechanisms and agential processes of acclimatisation and adaptation in policy reproduction are not explicitly modelled in existing accounts of policy drift. The purpose of the UK pharmaceutical services case study presented is to establish an argument that they should be; because they redefine the nature of barriers to agent-centred, intentional reform strategies.

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