

# A touch of class in Cardiff

**Raj Aggarwal, of Central Pharmacy, Cardiff, is the winner of the Pharmacy Business Health and Beauty Retailer Award for 2003. Douglas Simpson explains why...**

When I parked my car under elegant plane trees and walked the short distance to Central Pharmacy in Cardiff's South Eastern suburbs, I had a sense I was on my way to something special. It was just before 9am and people were going to work and taking children to school. The sun was shining. Everyone seemed smartly dressed. Women were wearing perfume. This was clearly a busy, prosperous area. A good place for a pharmacy that specialises in health and beauty, as does Central Pharmacy. This kind of pharmacy should do well here, I thought. And so it proved.

Central Pharmacy is about as good as it gets. The place is immaculate from top to bottom— from the well-appointed offices on the top floor, to the pristine street frontage.

I was met by Raj Aggarwal, director and superintendent pharmacist of the family company that owns the business. His wife, Usha, is co-director. Raj is a former high flyer with Boots the Chemists Ltd. He managed several of its top stores. He says he learnt a lot from that experience, but he decided to move on in 1983, and to establish his own business in Cardiff. At one time he owned five pharmacies, but he has sold three leaving him with two – Central Pharmacy and Village Pharmacy, which is about a mile away in Llanishen, also in the Cardiff suburbs. Village



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Pharmacy is more of a traditional community pharmacy. Central Pharmacy reflects the affluence of an area where many businessmen, university staff and Welsh assembly members live.

Both pharmacies have been fitted to a high standard by Dollar Rae – Village pharmacy following a relocation into newly built premises three years ago, and Central Pharmacy, last year. This is the third Dollar Rae make-over for Central Pharmacy since opening 14 years ago. Raj believes in updating and reinvesting regularly. The second refit, eight years ago, was followed by a grand opening by George Thomas, former Speaker of the House of Commons.

Raj showed me round Central Pharmacy. As well as the dispensary, medicines counter and perfumery on

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cosmetics.

But perfumery by no means dominates the business. There is great strength on the health side, too. The premises are within 100 yards of two major surgeries (12 doctors) and there are four other surgeries nearby. Medicines management services are provided to nursing and residential homes. The turnover split between the dispensary and the retail areas is 50:50.

the ground floor, there are offices and staff facilities on the top floor and rooms for beauty treatments and consultation on the floor in between. The recent refit has made provision for a consultation room alongside the dispensary.

The premises are immaculate from top to bottom. Even the staircases look good. The place is bright and airy and has a highly inviting atmosphere. Theme colours are white and silver. All staff present themselves well.

## Not just a pretty face

A large proportion of the retail area is devoted to perfumery. The pharmacy is an authorised stockist of all major fine fragrances, and has also developed a successful website ([www.escentual.co.uk](http://www.escentual.co.uk)) for internet sales of perfumes and

Three large street windows at Central pharmacy are redesigned by in-store window dressers each week. The same applies to Village Pharmacy.

Three full-time and one part-time pharmacist manage the two pharmacies. Each pharmacy has the equivalent of at least two trained technicians and the total staff number is 30. Raj describes them all as superb and sees them as being "part of the family". All human resources, staff welfare, paperwork and correspondence are handled by an administration manager, allowing the staff to concentrate on the customers.

A daily collection and delivery service is provided for the infirm and elderly,

## About the winner



Raj Aggarwal (left) receiving the Pharmacy Business Health & Beauty Retailer of the Year Award 2003, from Ramniklal Solanki, editor in chief Pharmacy Business and Patricia Hewitt, Trade & Industry Secretary

Raj Aggarwal graduated from Cardiff school of pharmacy in 1972. He then undertook preregistration experience with Boots the Chemists in Cardiff. This was followed by 10 years of senior managerial positions with Boots, which included posts at head office and at stores in various parts of the UK. He set up perfumery departments in some of those stores, including the Boots big shop in High Wycombe. Raj left Boots to establish his own business in 1983.

His professional interests include, membership of the South East Wales pharmaceutical committee and of the complaints and ethics committee of the S E Wales region. Raj also serves on the appeals committee of the George Thomas Hospice for Wales and is a board trustee with the Kidney Research Unit Foundation for Wales.

Raj says that he was delighted to receive the Pharmacy Business Health & Beauty Retailer award and is pleased that all the effort he and his family and staff are putting in has been recognised. Not that he sees his work as a burden. "It is good to win a prize for something that we enjoy doing anyway," he declares.



Some of the staff at the Central Pharmacy (L-R): Caroline Scrivens, Karen Lawrence, Annalise Branciamore, Becky Arnold (health and beauty care assistants), Raj Aggarwal, Bethan Johns (pharmacist) and Hayley Poole (senior pharmacy technician)

and pharmacists and technicians make regular domiciliary visits. Social Services use the pharmacies for a care in the community project. This involves supplying monitored dosage systems where there is poor compliance. Staff run diabetes and "well man" clinics with the help of local nurses. They carry out school visits, when they advise on the risks associated with drugs, alcohol and smoking. Pharmacy stock levels have been increased to meet demand for emergency palliative care drugs arising from links with local hospices.

The Central Pharmacy's consulting rooms are used by physiotherapists, a sports massage consultant, four beauty therapists and a consultant dermatologist. One of the rooms is also used from time to time by a staff member trained to use camouflage creams. Central Pharmacy is the only one in Cardiff providing this service. There is a nail bar in the shop area.

Raj speaks six Asian languages, which means that many members of the local Asian population come to him for advice and help.



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The latest pharmacy refit was informed by a demographic survey and analysis of point-of-sale data. The data told the company the kind of balance between health and beauty and the type of stock that was required. The pharmacy is very strong in specialist fragrance products. But most people buy toiletries in supermarkets, so only a basic stock of these is held.

Marketing strategy makes use of local radio and newspapers. A newsletter featuring fragrances and toiletries is mailed to a customer database every two months.

The mail-order website is run by Raj's son Rakesh, who is something of an expert with computers. More importantly, he has an MBA from Cardiff University. The website, which has a staff of three, is highly successful. All work, including packing, is carried out in-house.

Rakesh also runs the computer systems used in the company's pharmacies. These include a comprehensive point of sale system.

Raj's business philosophy is "quality, service and satisfaction". He builds everything around that.

**Pharmacy Business Health and Beauty Retailer Award 2003**

Awarded to the best Health and Beauty retailer

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