

Response of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland to the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government, Investment Strategy & Budget

***Northern Ireland's pharmacists:
delivering for health & assisting the economy***



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Foreword

4 January 2008

The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is encouraged by the prospects for improving healthcare delivery following the restoration of a devolved administration in Northern Ireland. The new elected Executive has an opportunity to pursue tailored policy solutions to Northern Ireland's specific and identified challenges in not only health, but other important policy areas too including education, the economy and social development. The PSNI therefore welcomes the publication of the Draft Programme for Government, Budget and Investment Strategy as the beginning of that process.

Northern Ireland's pharmacists have always played a vital role in the community, delivering much more than simply a medicines dispensing service. Pharmacists are at the heart of the health service, delivering expert advice to the public on the high street without the need for an appointment. As a professional body, the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland wishes to see that role not just continued but expanded and enhanced in the years ahead. By so doing, pharmacists will play a central role in helping the Northern Ireland Executive achieve the goals of its Draft Programme for Government.

This response outlines the PSNI's views on how pharmacists can deliver for the Executive and the people of Northern Ireland, the tools required, and the barriers to be overcome.

We look forward to working with Ministers and their officials in 2008 to ensure pharmacy in Northern Ireland is fully equipped to deliver for health, assist the economy and support sustainable communities.

Raymond Anderson,

President,

The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland

Executive Summary

The Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government (PfG) is a once in a decade opportunity to "do things differently" in order to meet the specific needs of Northern Ireland. This applies across a range of policy areas, not least of which are health, the economy and social development.

Pharmacists in Northern Ireland are eager to contribute to the successful implementation of the Programme for Government and therefore make a number of recommendations to the Executive.

1. Northern Ireland's Pharmacists: delivering for health

- Pharmacists have an important role in: relieving the workload of other health professionals, such as GPs and nurses; delivering cost efficiencies to the NHS; and, improving convenient access to health services for the public. **Pharmacy should be a central consideration within any discussions around health service reform in Northern Ireland.**

The PSNI recognise the budgetary pressures faced by all departments following the Comprehensive Spending Review. We believe that by working closely with the pharmacy profession the DHSSPS can achieve a number of cost efficiencies. Examples include: taking workload pressures off other healthcare professionals such as GPs; helping Incapacity Benefit claimants to manage long term illness and potentially enable a return to work; improving public health behaviours; and, ensuring best use of prescribed drug treatments. **An expanded and enhanced remit for pharmacists in service delivery is central to a more cost effective NHS. However such developments must be resourced and we are unclear as to how, in the current budget proposals, such enhancements can be funded.**

- As the Programme for Government documents recognise, Northern Ireland has particular challenges to meet in terms of achieving better public health outcomes. Pharmacists can play a vital role in changing and improving public health behaviour whether through Coronary Heart Disease risk assessments; smoking cessation services; or, the provision of weight management and dietary advice. **Pharmacists should be recognised by the**

Executive as at the frontline in improving Northern Ireland's public health and be closely included in public health strategy discussions and policy delivery.

- Northern Ireland needs to improve the mental health care delivered to the public. We refer the Executive to the recent report by Stephen Guy and Aaron Coulter on "Mental Health Pharmacy in Northern Ireland". For too long Mental Health Pharmacy has had a low priority with health service planners and has suffered from under investment. The PSNI requests that the DHSSPS addresses this anomaly in the period 2008-11. **The Executive should recognise the role of pharmacists in tackling mental health problems and prioritise mental health pharmacy appropriately.** Clearly mental health has been identified as a priority for the Executive however the training and funding to provide the necessary pharmacists with the required skills has not been identified.
- The PSNI reemphasise the point that an ageing population will create budgetary pressures on the DHSSPS over the lifetime of the Programme for Government. **As Northern Ireland's population grows older a rise in prescription numbers should be expected, and accounted for, in the period to 2011.**

2. Northern Ireland's Pharmacists: delivering for the economy

- The PSNI welcome the Programme for Government's economic objectives and the desire to address Northern Ireland's skills gap. We believe Northern Ireland can develop as a centre of excellence in pharmaceutical knowledge. **We note the PFG's target to increase by 300 the number of PHD research students at local universities and urge that PHD research in pharmacy and pharmacology at Queens University be recognised as an important area for the Executive to support.**
- The PSNI also believes pharmacists can assist in addressing Northern Ireland's high rates of economic inactivity. For example, by advising members of the public currently unable to work due to long term medical conditions on the most appropriate and effective medicines available and how to manage their use. **Pharmacists should be involved in Executive strategies to reduce economic inactivity.**

3. Overall needs of pharmacy in Northern Ireland:

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- Northern Ireland's pharmacists are excited and enthused by the role our profession can play in helping the Executive achieve its Programme for Government. However, in order to fulfil new responsibilities and areas of delivery, pharmacists require support from the Executive, namely:
 - Support with the costs of training;
 - Investment in new pharmacy facilities;
 - An upgraded ICT system similar to the e-Pharmacy programme instituted by the Scottish Executive;
 - Properly facilitated mental health pharmacy services;
 - Long term continuity of policy; and
 - An appropriate reward and incentive culture

Northern Ireland's Pharmacists: Delivering for Health

The public expenditure context of the Draft Budget

The Northern Ireland Executive's Draft Budget references the need to ameliorate the increasing share of public spending accounted for by Health and Personal Social Services in recent years. The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland suggests to the Executive 4 methods they might employ to achieve this. Northern Ireland's pharmacists can assist in:

1. taking workload pressures off other healthcare professionals such as GPs
2. helping Incapacity Benefit claimants to manage long term illness and potentially enable a return to work
3. improving public health behaviours
4. ensuring best use of prescribed drug treatments

1. Taking pressure off other parts of the health service

Northern Ireland's pharmacists have a key role to play in helping the DHSSPS achieve greater outcomes from its available budget and continue to provide an ever-growing range of healthcare services to the public, many that previously may only have been available in a GP's clinic. The pharmacy profession should be seen by DHSSPS as a central reference point in discussions about how to deliver overall cost efficiency in the delivery of healthcare.

The PSNI look forward to working with the DHSSPS and the new Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit about the future role of Pharmacy in Northern Ireland in delivering cash releasing efficiencies whilst improving performance and delivery.

2. Assisting the economically inactive back into work

Not only does the large number of economically inactive members of the workforce produce a structural weakness in Northern Ireland's economy, it also presents a large current expenditure to the DHSSPS in terms of benefit payments. As described above, Northern Ireland's pharmacists are well placed to assist those with long term medical conditions back into work. We look forward to further discussions with the Executive about how this function can be enhanced in line with Government policy. Consequent budget savings from the social

Further savings to the drugs bill could be derived by enhancing the role of pharmacists in terms of:

- assisting GPs with prescribing advice;
- medicines reviews to improve the quality of prescribing; and,
- medicines monitoring to improve patients' understanding of the medicines they are prescribed.

Underpinning ICT infrastructure required to deliver savings:

The PSNI also re-iterate that the quality of service provided by pharmacists and the resultant benefits to patients would be greatly enhanced by increased access to clinical information and by appropriate investment in ICT systems. For example, the e-Pharmacy Programme instituted by the Scottish Executive delivers underpinning technical support for a Minor Ailment Service (MAS). This service allows registered users to go straight to their community pharmacist for advice on common conditions that they can self treat. Where appropriate the pharmacist can supply the medicine directly, thus eliminating the need for a GP appointment.

In order to branch out into new services, pharmacists in Northern Ireland also require some assurances that the profession's needs in important areas such as training, facilities investment, appropriate incentives and long term policy continuity will be met.

Foreseeable challenges to the Drugs Bill

As newer and more expensive drug treatments become available the PSNI believes that the Northern Ireland Executive must recognise this as a financial challenge. As people both live longer and survive more serious illnesses the drugs burden also increases. This budgetary pressure needs to be recognised by the Executive and accounted for within its Programme for Government.

Northern Ireland's healthcare challenges

The PSNI agree with the challenges that will be faced by health services in Northern Ireland up to 2011, as laid out in the Programme for Government documents. These include:

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Currently 116,000 members of the workforce in Northern Ireland are economically inactive, many of whom are long term claimants of incapacity benefit due to illness and impairment. These high levels of economic inactivity constrain the performance of Northern Ireland's economy.

More can and should be done to assist this cohort into employment. Pharmacists are ready and willing to play their role in helping members of the public better manage long term conditions, enabling a return to work. We look forward to further discussion with the DHSSPS, DEL and the DETI about the role of community pharmacists in tackling economic inactivity, especially in relation to the forthcoming introduction of the Employment and Support Allowance in 2008.

