



**PRESS RELEASE – Wednesday, 28 May 2008**

## **Assembly votes to Maintain Local Control of Pharmacy Regulation**

MLAs have given their unanimous support for the maintenance of local pharmacy regulation and have called on the Northern Ireland Health Minister to bring the statutory framework of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland up to date to meet modern needs. The Society has requested its current legislative order be renewed in order to enhance its role in protecting patient safety and developing pharmacy services to the Northern Ireland public. A new Pharmacy (Northern Ireland) Order should give the Society access to a greater range of sanctions in Fitness to Practice hearings, and enable the registration and regulation of pharmacy technicians in Northern Ireland.

Iris Robinson MLA, Chair of the Assembly Health Committee, tabled a motion for debate in the Assembly noting the achievements of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland over the last 80 years, supporting the Society's proposals for reform, and calling on the Minister to bring forward necessary modernising legislation. Mrs. Robinson received all party support and her motion was passed without opposition after an hour and a half of debate.

In her opening speech Mrs Robinson (DUP, Strangford) underlined the value of local regulation and also expressed concern that suggestions for a new UK-wide

regulator could lead to local needs not being met: *“Our local body should remain separate and distinct from its counterpart organisation in GB. Replacing the local regulatory and professional functions with a centralised UK-wide system would inhibit the ability of the devolved Administration to develop in a manner that reflects the overall strategy for healthcare in Northern Ireland.”*

Sinn Fein members of the Health Committee Sue Ramsay (West Belfast) and Claire McGill (West Tyrone) added their support to the Health Committee Chair’s motion. Sue Ramsay noted the role of a local regulator in operating all-Island regulation on such issues as counterfeit medicine smuggling and the mutual recognition of qualifications whilst Claire McGill praised the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland’s proposals for modernisation as this enabled greater local patient input into the regulator’s work.

Mr. John McCallister (UUP Health Spokesperson) complimented the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland on its willingness to adapt to changing needs: *“The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland has continually transformed in order to meet developing professional and regulatory standards. In many instances, it has been the model of good practice for other regulators in the UK, exemplified by the independent inspectorate in the Department. The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland has made a persuasive case as to why it should remain a separate entity from its counterparts in Great Britain.”*

SDLP Health Committee member Tommy Gallagher emphasised the increased need for local regulation due to devolution: *“Pharmacists, like other health professionals, will be involved more in delivering key services in Northern Ireland and in taking forward its health strategy. Working together effectively with the other partners in the Health Service will require a local model for regulating the pharmacy profession — a model that meets the needs of the pharmacists and the patients and reflects the political reality in Northern Ireland.”*

Alliance Party Health Spokesperson Kieran McCarthy added his voice to the calls for a new Pharmacy (Northern Ireland) Order: *“The Pharmaceutical Society of*

*Northern Ireland has served the community in Northern Ireland extremely well over the years, and the Alliance Party has every confidence that the years ahead will also be well served if the conclusions in 'Future of Pharmacy registration, regulation and representation in Northern Ireland' are accepted. I expect the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to agree to update the Pharmaceutical Society's statutory framework in the near future."*

Responding to the points raised, the Minister reiterated his position that he will not make a final decision on the future of pharmacy regulation in Northern Ireland until the General Pharmaceutical Council in Great Britain has been formed in 2011. However he failed to commit his department to introducing a new Pharmacy (Northern Ireland) Order, and instead expressed a desire to further understand elements of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland's modernisation proposals. The Society will seek further conversations with the Department on these matters to ensure the public in Northern Ireland continue to enjoy a high standard of protection and patient safety.

Reflecting on the debate, Society President Raymond Anderson commented:

*"Throughout the last 6 months the vocal All-Party support for retaining pharmacy regulation within Northern Ireland has encouraged and buoyed us as we continue to make the case to the Minister. The Assembly has now unanimously expressed its will on this matter. We hope modernising legislation will be forthcoming before the end of the year to ensure high standards of patient safety and protection in Northern Ireland are maintained."*

**Ends**

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## **Editor's notes**

1. The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland proposals for the future of pharmacy can be found at the following URL address:  
<http://www.psni.org.uk/documents/233>
2. Iris Robinson's motion was as follows:

### **Regulation of Pharmacy Profession**

That this Assembly notes the work of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland in regulating the pharmacy profession over the last eighty years; supports the conclusions of the "Future of Pharmacy Registration, Regulation and Representation in Northern Ireland" document; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to update the society's statutory framework accordingly.

3. The Health Minister recently gave the following written answer:

**Friday 16 May**

### **Regulation of Pharmacies**

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an update on proposals for the regulation of Pharmacy; and to detail any future plans he has in relation to the regulation of Pharmacy.

(AQW 6699/08)

Mr M McGimpsey: I recently met representatives of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland and am now in receipt of their proposals for the future regulation of pharmacy in Northern Ireland.

Having received an update on the formation of the proposed General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC), from the Chairman of the Pharmacy Regulation and Leadership Oversight Group, I have decided it would be premature to make any decisions before the GPhC has been formed and has established its protocols to deal with devolved matters.

My department will continue to work with the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland and the other relevant bodies to ensure that patients and the public are fully protected at all times.

4. Further details on professional regulation and devolution can be found in the Society publication "*Serving Northern Ireland's devolved healthcare system*"

<http://www.psni.org.uk/documents/263/Serving%20Northern%20Ireland's%20Devolved%20Healthcare%20System.pdf>