

Presidents address to 83rd Annual General Meeting of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland, 2nd October 2008.

The past year has been interesting, turbulent and extremely busy for all those at University Street. This includes all the staff, the Council members and the Officers of the Society and I would like to extend my thanks to all those who have worked above and beyond the call of duty and who have supported me throughout the past year.

I would also like to formally thank the members of Council for their time and commitment given to the work of the Society, particularly the chairs of the committees and the officers.

The objectives facing the Society over the past year have fundamentally remained the same but with the emphasis changing on what needed to be delivered. That is why we are still here

1. to Protect the public, - by way of Regulation
2. to provide leadership to the profession, by lobbying, promoting, debating and representing the views of the profession in the many different committees and working groups where the perspective of pharmacy is required

Progress report

Over the last year there has been much progress in the work undertaken by the Council and the Office on behalf of members.

Firstly: we now have a staff structure which truly reflects the needs of the Society. Our new Director Trevor Patterson joined us in February,. Trevor comes from a Civil engineering background but has been involved with the setting up of Trust Mark, a membership organization, supported by Government to set standards for the construction/building industry. His knowledge of the workings of Government combined with his understanding of membership organizations has been significant to the way the Society has responded to the challenges of the White Paper "Trust Assurance and Safety".

Mark Neale (Head of Public Affairs) who joined us last November has a background in politics. He is by profession a microbiologist and his combination of science and political affairs has been a real asset when dealing with Government Departments, Ministers, officials and civil servants.

Deidre McAree who many will know, as a pharmacist, joined us in January as our Post registration Facilitator. The focus of her current role is Education with Continuing Professional Development (CPD) being part of her remit.

She has significant experience of teaching at undergraduate, pre-registration and post-registration levels.

Richard Price also joined us in the past year as a Policy Advisor. Richard has been involved in the development and articulation of policies to address pharmacy issues in Northern Ireland and supports the Head of Public Affairs in the area of communications with stakeholders.

These new posts have enabled the Council to concentrate on the strategic issues affecting the regulation of pharmacists and the matter of leadership in the knowledge that the office now has the resources to operationally manage the organization.

One of key pieces of work Council produced after Trevor's appointment was agreeing the response to the White Paper and this was published in our document ["The Future of Pharmacy registration, regulation and representation in Northern Ireland"](#) This has been shared with all our members and we continue to actively promote the model developed. This model gives the public confidence when it comes to safety and good governance while at the same time ensuring pharmacy and pharmacists retain their legitimate influence in all aspects of professional leadership and development. . Both these aspects could be lost if we allow pharmacy in Northern Ireland to be regulated by a GPhC that does not fully reflect the diversity of the needs and aspirations arising out of the devolution of all matters relating to health.

CHRE reviewed our performance in February and while the Society is praised for its commitment to public safety, the report frequently references the limitations of our legislation created by the 1976 Order. Working with the department the Society is attempting to modernize our legislation bring it more into line with other regulators and fit for purpose locally. The makeup of Council, fitness to practice sanctions, CPD and a non-practicing register are all under discussion at present. It is my hope that these changes be progressed as soon as possible, enabling the PSNI to fulfill its role as a modern regulator.

The Health Minister Mr Michale McGimpsey has listened to the Society and as a result of discussions with him, he has indicated that he will delay any final decision on the regulation/registration of pharmacists and the joining or not joining of a GPhC until the GPhC is set up and running. This is good news for pharmacy in Northern Ireland. In the interim his decision is that regulation remains in Northern Ireland. We have never said we want to be an island and work in isolation to other bodies. yet we do not however want to be swallowed up in an English centric body where local needs are given little importance and where our politicians are bypassed and the public in Northern Ireland have nowhere to go with complaints except London.

I think it would be appropriate at this point to congratulate the Minister on his decision to introduce free prescriptions for all following his review of prescription charges. As a Society we have supported the principle of free prescriptions for a long time and the recent decision, as long as it is backed by the Executive is very welcome.

The need for lobbying, communication to our members, to the public and with other stakeholders has never been greater and I hope all members will have seen an increase in all these areas over the past year. The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland is now being sought out for comment on many issues by the media which in the past would never have happened or if it did it was on a much smaller scale. Radio interviews, press coverage and membership communication has all increased in the past year and it is my hope that this will continue. This is a period of great change and communication is essential at this time. We may not always get it right but we have upped our game and we will continue to seek ways to communicate with members and stakeholders.

The issue of CPD is never far away from members. The Council is very aware of the issues and the educational committee continues to review the process for validating CPD. It must be noted however that at a recent conference in England where all the healthcare regulators were looking at CPD and revalidation our scheme was rated very highly by attendees. Many other organization's CPD is still focused on continuing education and not necessarily on professional development. It is good to know therefore that we are ahead of the game when identifying training needs, seeking information to fill these needs, recording our learning and finally how we apply our new skills. This is not revalidation but it certainly will become part of the process of revalidation in the future. This is now being discussed and models developed. We at the Society are very aware of the implications of this and are already involved in discussions on how this will impact on pharmacists.

Challenges for the year ahead

The year ahead will not see any let up in activity at the Society. The work has really only begun. Legislative changes take time, lobbying is ongoing, communication is essential and there is a real need to develop the patient and public forum and the professional forum as identified in our proposal "[The Future of Pharmacy registration, regulation and representation in Northern Ireland](#)"

Putting the public at the centre of a modern regulator is now a central theme. As a Society we are currently working with the Department to see changes in the composition of Council that will usher in a new council of equal lay and professional members. This process has already begun in relation to our statutory committee and over the next few months we hope to see the necessary legislative changes that will create our new Council.

As part of the changes we also are working on the creation of our public and patient's forum. This body will be made up of interested members of the public bringing their views and experiences of pharmacy. These views and experiences will help inform the debates and discussions within Council. This process has begun and within the next month we will be holding a

seminar about the formation of this body. This we believe will bring the public closer to the Society.

At the same time regulation will become more separated from professional leadership,. In our model we have identified a way this can be done whilst at the same time further developing professional leadership in Northern Ireland – this through our Professional Forum. It is my belief that a professional leadership body cannot come from nothing. It is important to build on what we have and see the seeds of life grow fully into a vibrant body. If these are not tendered correctly they will die. That is why the professional forum is essential to create a vehicle that will legitimately allow a voice for pharmacy to develop further. The new GPhC in GB will have very close connections with any new professional body, at least initially. They will; be based in the same building and they will share resources, so why cannot this be the case in Northern Ireland? Professional leadership will inform regulation and may to a greater or less extent facilitate CPD, revalidation and educational learning. No-one yet knows in any discussions I have been party to as to how this will all play out. It is important therefore we do not throw out the baby with the bath water and that is why we at the Society still see the development of a pharmacy professional forum and public patient forum working with the new Council to help develop processes and procedures which make CPD and revalidation amongst other things appropriate and achievable.

Issues and guidance around the Responsible Pharmacist legislation will also need to be developed and addressed. The recent "Which report" put a question mark over Government legislation allowing pharmacists to leave their premises for up to 2 hours. There are learning outcomes in this that we

and Government shouldn't miss. It is necessary that we all take this on board and work for the good of the profession, the protection of the public and development of a skill mix which will allow pharmacists to reach their full potential as the "medicines expert"

Northern Ireland, is the only part of the UK which shares a land border with another EU state, and we at the Society are now in formal discussions with the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland to help manage the impact of patients being able to have a doctor's prescription processed on either side of the border. This will build on the cross border cooperation already in place which recognizes professional qualifications and a directive on temporary and occasional service provision.

I couldn't finish before mentioning the work of Michelle McCorry who has been working tirelessly at revising our Code of Ethics parts 2-5. The Ethics and law committee has completed a review of part one and is overseeing the revision of parts 2-5. Michelle will be known by many in the profession and we are delighted she has been able to join us temporarily to facilitate this work. It is extremely important that this work is done and I would ask all pharmacists to contribute to the consultation.

Finally again I would like to thank all the staff - particularly those I have not mentioned in this report, Council members and Officers who have supported me over the last year and without whose help I would not have been able to fulfill the tasks and responsibilities of being President.

Thank-you.