



Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland celebrate Free Prescriptions Achievement

The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland has this morning welcomed the coming in to being of free prescriptions for all members of the public in Northern Ireland as an historic achievement for the health service.

Ms Ann Bowen, President of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland commented:

“The advent of free prescriptions is tremendous news for all patients, and ensures nobody is financially dissuaded from taking the treatments they require. Evidence and research has repeatedly shown that prescription charges are linked to many patients skimping on their medication on the grounds of cost. This can all too often lead to unnecessary and costly hospital admission, irreversible organ damage or worse.

The Minister’s decision to introduce free prescriptions ensures truly equal access to the health service for all and proves the benefit of devolved decisions made locally. We fully support this move as being in the interests of patients and public safety”

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For further information please contact Mark Neale, Head of Public Affairs at the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland, on 028 90 326 927 or 07854 004 884 mark.neale@psni.org.uk

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland is the regulatory body for pharmacy in Northern Ireland. It protects public safety in pharmacy by:
 - setting and promoting standards for pharmacists' admission to the register and for remaining on the register;
 - maintaining a publicly accessible register of pharmacists, and pharmacy premises, in Northern Ireland;
 - handling concerns about the Fitness to Practise of registrants, acting as a complaints portal and taking action to protect the public; and
 - ensuring high standards of education and training for pharmacists in Northern Ireland.

2. “*A cause of ill-health*”, a survey by MORI in 2001 found that 7% of people failed to get all or part of their medication dispensed due to the cost of prescription charges.

3. For some conditions, such as Asthma, under-treatment or skimping on medication can lead to irreversible lung damage, lower quality of life, and an increase in both the frequency of asthma attacks and the burden on the NHS

4. A study by researchers at the London School of Economics published in the *International Journal for Equity in Health* in 2008 found that:
 - Prescription charges cause patients to forego the use of some drugs, where the patient attempts discriminate on the basis of the usefulness of the prescription drug in question but are not always able to judge appropriately.
 - Poorer households are most affected by prescription charges, being more likely to forego medicine use when faced with prescription charges

<http://www.equityhealthj.com/content/7/1/12>

5. For study by Canadian researchers for *the Journal of the American Medical Association* in 2001 found that prescription charges are related to reductions in use of essential drugs and higher rates of serious adverse incidents and emergency hospital admissions.

<http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/285/4/421>