

Ireland urgently requires new pharmacy school to stave off impending crisis



Ireland is not training enough pharmacists which will result in significant healthcare problems if

not urgently addressed. This warning was issued by the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) which is calling for the establishment of a new school of pharmacy in Ireland.

Qualifying as a pharmacist in Ireland requires studying for five years to obtain a masters level qualification. Pharmacy courses are offered in just three higher education institutes in Ireland. Last year, Ireland trained just 165 pharmacists, which the IPU argues is insufficient to deliver the increasing demands on the sector.

Commenting on the potential for crisis, IPU President Dermot Twomey said, “Ireland has just over 6,700 registered pharmacists. Annually we are training just 2.4% of that number, this is simply not enough, and is leading to major problems for community pharmacies across the country. This needs to be addressed urgently. At this rate, the sector will soon be unable to cope with retirements, let alone the pressures caused by our growing population that is increasingly older, as well as greater demands on the sector as a whole.

“For too long Ireland has relied on the UK and other countries to train our healthcare workers, in particular pharmacists. The UK is also experiencing a shortfall of an estimated 3,000 community pharmacists, which will only exacerbate the shortages here in Ireland. Brexit and the challenges of COVID have also highlighted how unsustainable outsourcing education is. We cannot expect other countries to fill the gaps of our education system any longer, particularly for skills essential to our healthcare system.

The Irish Pharmacy Union believes a new school of pharmacy is urgently required in Ireland to meet the demands of the sector and Ireland’s healthcare needs. “The problem is plain to see” argued Mr Twomey “but so is the solution. Establishing a new school of pharmacy at one of our many excellent third level institutions could have a dramatic effect on the sector. This could also help reduce the CAO points requirements allowing more young people interested in a career in pharmacy to achieve that goal.”

With the growing GP shortage across the country, pharmacists are playing an increasingly important role in community care. This could be undermined if action is not taken now, according to Dermot Twomey. “Pharmacists are increasingly providing additional services such as vaccinations, smoking cessation therapy and diabetes and blood pressure monitoring. With fewer GPs available nationwide, pharmacists are doing more and proud to be doing so. But if there aren’t enough pharmacists a reduction in services is inevitable.”

Mr Twomey concluded by calling on the government to commit to addressing the pharmacist shortage. “Ireland needs an action plan for healthcare skills, ensuring we are training the right professions in the right number. We are calling on the Taoiseach and Ministers Donnelly and Harris to take definitive action in delivering this. This must be a priority for today or it will be a major problem in the years ahead.”