

Pharmacies could provide solutions to current healthcare crisis



IPU critical as sector is consistently overlooked

Amidst record levels of overcrowding in Irish hospitals, the community pharmacy sector could provide solutions to free up capacity elsewhere in the health system, according to the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU).

Speaking as health authorities continue to warn that the crisis in our health system is set to continue, President of the IPU Dermot Twomey said, “The pharmacy sector is, as it always is, ready to step up to do more to support patients and provide care in our communities. Ireland’s 1,900 pharmacies are located in practically every community. They are easily accessible and should be among the first line of defence for our health system. But we need to be empowered to do so by the relevant authorities.”

“Last week the public were advised to avoid A&Es by the HSE who recommended they visit pharmacies and GPs instead. Pharmacies are of course well placed to provide care and health advice to those who need it. However, we cannot understand why the HSE is directing patients into pharmacies while consistently doing nothing to increase the range of clinical services we

can provide.

“There is huge potential in community pharmacy and much more the sector can do to deliver on the Sláintecare vision of one universal health service for all, providing the right care, in the right place at the right time in turn relieving pressure on the healthcare system.”

Mr Twomey cited several examples of services he claims pharmacies could start offering almost immediately, which would free up capacity elsewhere in the health system. “If properly resourced and if allowed to do so, there is a range of new clinical services which we could deliver. A key priority amongst these is the development and roll-out of a national Community Pharmacy-based Triage Programme including a Minor Ailment Scheme, use of Emergency Medicines, and the treatment of Minor Injuries. A lot of these services are available in other jurisdictions and would potentially eliminate thousands of needless GP and A&E visits each month.”

“With an increase in the number of GP only medical cards on the way this year increasing pressure on an already overworked sector, the HSE needs to actively put in place plans to manage their capacity. Providing greater opportunities for pharmacies to provide patient care would benefit patients and the health system alike.”

In conclusion Mr Twomey criticised health authorities for sleepwalking into the current crisis and ignoring obvious solutions. “The surge in viral infections across the country in recent weeks was predictable and predicted. It is no longer acceptable to explain away the scenes in our hospitals as the result of some extraordinary event. We must do everything practical to enhance the availability and accessibility of patient care. This must include the involvement of the pharmacy sector.”

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