

Pharmacists welcome launch of Viagra as an over-the-counter medication

- **Erectile dysfunction drugs are often bought online, which can have dangerous consequences**

17 January 2021: Pharmacists welcome the launch earlier this week of Viagra Connect (sildenafil) as an over-the-counter medication. The IPU welcomes this development, as erectile dysfunction drugs are among the medicines most often bought online and purchasing them in this way from unregulated sources can pose a major health risk to consumers.

Viagra Connect is for the treatment of the symptoms of erectile dysfunction in men aged 18 and over, and as of 11 January, is available without prescription as a pharmacy-only medicine.

Community pharmacist and IPU member Tomás Conefrey said, “Pharmacists play a key role in supporting people to manage their health conditions. In order to purchase Viagra Connect, men aged 18 and over will need to answer questions from their pharmacist about their symptoms, their general health, and any other medications they are taking, so that the pharmacist can determine whether Viagra Connect is suitable for them. In cases where pharmacists believe the product is unsuitable for clinical reasons, they will advise men to see their doctor for further assistance.”

The ongoing problem with online medicines was highlighted by the seizure in 2020 of over 49,000 illegal medicine products by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), and erectile dysfunction products were among the most common items found.

Mr Conefrey said many of these products sold on websites and social media pages are falsely advertised and the reality is that medicines and lifestyle products from unregulated online sources pose a major health risk to consumers. They sometimes contain none of the active ingredient, or sometimes too much or too little of some ingredients, which are also of questionable quality.

Mr Conefrey concluded, “There are also other risk factors that people may not fully consider when purchasing medication online, including the importance of risk assessments. Your local community pharmacist is a medicines expert, who will ensure that any medicine you get from them is suitable for you and won’t react with any other medications you are taking. However, when purchasing medication online, all the established safety nets are bypassed. We welcome this week’s launch of Viagra as an over-the-counter medication as it will allow for people to speak with their pharmacist and be assured that they are not receiving a counterfeit product, and that a risk assessment can be carried out.”

