

# Report of PSI Public Council Meeting of 18 June 2020



Ireland may be easing out of lockdown, but the PSI June Council Meeting was still a virtual event, writes Danielle Barron in her report on the PSI meeting of 18 June 2020.

**W**hile political parties tussled mere yards up the road in Government Buildings, the election of the President and Vice-President of the PSI was a smooth affair, with Joanne Kissane and Michael Lyons returned as President and Vice-president, respectively, for a further year. In *Roinn Sláinte*, the expectation is that the incumbent Health Minister will most likely not be returning to his role; Registrar Mr Niall Byrne signalled that this makes forward planning somewhat challenging, as new political appointees may have “different priorities”. “There are new uncertainties entering the mix, and it is a dynamic environment – but then healthcare tends to be like that,” he told attendees.

Mr Byrne began, as is now customary, by furnishing the meeting’s virtual attendees with update on the PSI’s response to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Mr Byrne told the Council members that, to date, a total of 38 pharmacists and one pharmaceutical assistant have been restored to the register via the Emergency Restoration route. He added that the IIOF, in collaboration with the PSI, has developed a specific resource for the purpose of providing support to those returning to practice.

The Registrar also noted that amendments to the PSI (Fees) Rules 2014 had been drafted to allow for pharmacies to apply for a deferral of fees up to July 31 of this year, with any deferred fees not falling due until September 30. These are currently with the Minister for Health, awaiting his consent.

Work on life after lockdown is also progressing in the PSI. Preparations are currently underway for the rescheduling of practice reviews for later in the year, and the PSI is working with the IIOF to develop specific CPD resources for pharmacists during COVID-19. “A working group with PSI

and IIOF is being established to ensure early delivery of this resource,” noted Mr Byrne. PSI representatives also are continuing to work with the Department of Health on responding to COVID challenges in relation to medicines, including developing a Serious Shortage Protocols (SSP) framework and other legislative amendments, he added.

A major talking point at the meeting was the development of operational standards that will apply to pharmacies during the pandemic, which the PSI began work on in May. “These standards will describe the outcomes which PSI expects from pharmacies in terms of their continued delivery of safe services and a safe environment for patients, public and their staff in the continued presence of COVID-19,” explained Mr Byrne.

The Registrar expounded on the background to the standards, saying it was a significant challenge to turn them around in such a short

timeframe. He noted that while it is important to give credit for good practice, it is also important to make clear “what good looks like”. “We also need to make clear to the public what they can expect from a good quality pharmacy,” he said, adding that his hope is that the standards are seen as “positive and helpful”. Michael Lyons noted that guidance will be crucial as footfall in pharmacies begins to increase but Marie Louisa Power queried how monitoring in relation to the standards would operate in practice. Mr Byrne said a quality assessment framework will be published in conjunction with the standards but they “expect a high degree of compliance” and noted his preference for announced inspections.

Updates on the 2020 Service Plan and Corporate Strategy showed that, despite the pandemic, many projects were progressing, perhaps not full speed ahead but certainly had not ground to a halt. Mr Byrne noted that the PSI had had its

first in-person engagement with the Department of Health since the crisis had begun and this meeting had proven fruitful, with aspects of reform of the Pharmacy Act discussed in detail (a project that had been progressing satisfactorily until the pandemic hit, noted the Registrar). A suggestion by Paul Turpin that discussions take place in advance of any tangible work on the Act, so that Council members have “solutions ready”, was welcomed by Mr Byrne.

Ms Power noted that the continuous improvement project, to assure the safe supply of medicines from pharmacies into residential care settings, had been deferred as a result of the COVID crisis; she queried whether this could not be reconsidered, given the focus on nursing homes and residential care settings during the outbreak. Mr Byrne pointed out that this deferral was simply unavoidable due to a lack of resources, but Dr Ailís Quinlan, who works as a Health and Quality policy adviser to SAGE, noted that medication safety had not been highlighted as a negative issue during this time.

This discussion was followed by Ms Damhnait Gaughan presenting the recommendations of the

accreditation team on the MPharm programmes at Trinity College Dublin, RCSI Dublin, and University College Cork. As a result of the very positive findings of the accreditation team, the recognition and approval of each of the programmes was granted for the maximum five-year period allowed in the legislation, with members noting the volume of work involved in accreditation favours a longer period.

Ms Gaughan also sought approval by Council for the amendment of the PSI (Registration) Rules 2008, so that discretion could continue to be applied in assessing third country qualifications past 31 July, in light of the ongoing pandemic. She noted that a level of flexibility needed to be in place should a second wave of the virus manifest, recognising that some applicants may have certain skillsets that would provide particular benefit to the health system here. Community pharmacist member Mr Mark Jordan argued that “a large number” of locum pharmacists do not want this to go ahead as it will affect their work prospects and he cautioned the Council against “ostracising” this cohort. Locums are already short of work as pharmacists

simply aren't taking holidays, he added. Mr Byrne noted the self-selecting nature of these responses and said that in the public health context, what matters is maximising the availability of qualified pharmacists.

Graham Knowles of the Performance and Resources Committee then sought approval by Council of APPEL's business case for the reallocation of approved Tutor Training Funding to online training instead of face-to-face training; he told attendees that the current crisis had demonstrated how useful this will be, with training down to 70% of pre-COVID levels. The funding ceiling of €1,500 was queried by Ms Nicola Tallant, who offered her services, saying she was willing to host a series of webinars for substantially less.

Muireann Ní Shúilleabháin of the Regulatory and Professional Policy Committee sought a request for approval by Council on the guidance in relation to providing the seasonal influenza vaccine to children aged six months and older. Some members expressed disquiet in relation to the guidance, with one cautioning against “over-guidance”, while others noted that most parents of children aged under-six would

simply avail of free GP care if seeking the flu vaccine. Ms Ní Shúilleabháin commented that guidance is just that, and said she believed pharmacists would make their own risk assessments.

An update on the PSI practical guidance for providing a pharmacy vaccination service during the COVID-19 pandemic was also given by Ms Ní Shúilleabháin, who outlined that the Committee had considered the draft document at its meeting last week and that it is still in development. It will complement the existing PSI guidance on safe delivery of vaccination services in pharmacies, focusing on adapting vaccination services to help reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and to protect patients and pharmacy staff. The document will be offered for consideration to the next Council meeting on 23 July. Sean Reilly noted that, in the context of a potential vaccine for COVID-19 becoming available in the medium term, pharmacists must be ready for this and be cognisant of the critical role they could play in its widespread roll-out. As they say: fail to prepare, prepare to fail.



## IPU Product File Successfully Maintains ISO Certification

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