Fit and Well: Changing Lives 2012-2022

The Pharmacy Forum (hereafter referred to as the ‘Forum’) is the professional leadership body for pharmacy in Northern Ireland. The Forum leads and supports the development of the profession, promotes best practice among pharmacists and represents all sections of pharmacy practice.

The Forum welcomes the opportunity to comment on ‘Fit and Well: Changing Lives -2012-2022’.

Northern Ireland’s pharmacists have always played a vital role in the community, delivering much more than simply a medicines supply service. Pharmacists are at the heart of the health service and their communities, delivering expert advice to the public on the high street without the need for an appointment.

The network of over 530 community pharmacies; the large number of locations and extended opening hours make community pharmacy one of the most accessible healthcare services available. Community pharmacies are usually open at weekends, and can be open late at night or on a bank holiday.

Pharmacists are qualified medical professionals, experts in medicines; are also well trained to offer advice and support on other health issues, including the management of minor ailments.

As a professional body, the Forum wishes to see that role not just continued but expanded and enhanced in the years ahead. By so doing, pharmacists will play a central role in helping achieve the goals outlined in the ten year strategy.

Overall
The Forum broadly agrees with the aims, vision, values and principles of ‘Fit and Well – Changing Lives.’ The Forum is supportive of the life course approach and the proposal to measure outcomes by key life stages.

Clarity is required around how outcomes will be measured.
Working across government departments

The Forum emphasise the importance of other government departments demonstrating their commitment to public health.

The allocation of an increase percentage to the overall health budget to public health is welcome.

However, health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities is not just a matter for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS); it also requires joint action across government and partnership working. In most cases, only the lead government department is identified and it is not clear how commitments will be developed and delivered collaboratively.

Contribution of pharmacy

The central focus of our response will outline the Forum’s views on how pharmacists can contribute to the public health agenda, the tools required, and the barriers to be overcome.

We have referenced some examples of what the Forum consider to be best practice and examples where pharmacy can help deliver the long and short term objectives outlined in the document.

Essential to the health service meeting the challenges of tomorrow is arresting the disturbing trends in areas such as obesity and the rise of avoidable lifestyle diseases. Pharmacy has a vital role to play in helping the health service achieve its goals in this area.

Reducing smoking through pharmacy

Smoking remains the single greatest cause of preventable illness and premature death in Northern Ireland, and is also the leading cause of health inequalities in our society.\(^1\)

All the evidence to date shows that people who receive regular support and advice throughout the quitting process are more likely to succeed, and one of the most accessible sources of advice and support can be found through community pharmacy. Pharmacy smoking cessation services offer a particularly accessible means of quitting tobacco for individuals living in rural and remote areas where other sources of assistance may be more limited.

The Forum is also mindful of research conducted by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) in Northern Ireland into smoking cessation\(^2\) which demonstrates that pharmacy is the preferred location for members of the public to receive smoking cessation services and one of the most likely locations for a patient to be informed of smoking cessation services.

Screening, prevention and early intervention through pharmacy

Screening is a cost-effective means of preventative healthcare, detecting danger signs in an individual before they become more serious to the individual. A wide range of screening services can be provided through pharmacies. A great advantage of screening through

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1 Ten-year tobacco control strategy for Northern Ireland (DHSSPS) 28 February 2012
2 Statistics on Smoking Cessation Services in Northern Ireland
http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-public-health/stats-smoking-cessation.htm
pharmacy is that pharmacies tend to see a broader cohort of people to those who see their GP and therefore can access and diagnose people who otherwise would not have been tested.

Examples of screening services that can be made available in a pharmacy include:

- **Vascular disease screening, including diabetes**

Vascular diseases - heart disease, stroke, diabetes and kidney disease - account for more than half the mortality gap between rich and poor. Yet, with early detection these diseases can be identified and treated before major complications arise.

In terms of screening locations, community pharmacists, by virtue of their uniquely accessible format, are likely to come into contact with people with undiagnosed diabetes who rarely access their GP and other mainstream NHS services.

An example is the NHS Health Check provided through pharmacy in England, which includes checking the individual’s blood pressure and Body Mass Index.

Birmingham South PCT commissioned a ‘Heart MOT’ pilot, a cardiovascular risk-based assessment, in 30 community pharmacies in Birmingham. The results of the pilot show that males who would not normally see a GP access the pharmacy led- services. In addition those individuals from deprived areas and with a minority ethnic background also accessed this service from community pharmacy. Of those assessed, 60 per cent were male, 65 per cent were from the average, less deprived, and most deprived quintiles.

The Forum consider there is underexplored opportunity to capture more undiagnosed diabetes and vascular disease cases through pharmacy in Northern Ireland than is currently the case, and should therefore be considered.

**Tackling Obesity through Pharmacy**

The whole of society has its role to play in combating the growing problem of obesity, and within that pharmacy too has a key part to play. For example, community pharmacies have a central role in the prevention and treatment of obesity through:

- Recognition and the provision of medical advice
- Management and referrals
- Measuring and explaining BMI; the provision of dietary and lifestyle advice;
- Advice on realistic goals for weight loss
- Regular checks and analysis of food diaries
- Education on calorie and fat intake general nutrition and reading of food labels and
- Advice on physical activity.

Providing patients with the education and support needed to make important lifestyle changes is a key element of any obesity management strategy.

Indeed, due to the unique location of its services, pharmacy is well placed to reach some of the most difficult to reach social cohorts, such as deprived communities, often being open when GP surgeries are not, with a health professional available without appointment.
Enabling pharmacy to deliver vaccination services currently only provided in GP surgeries (e.g. winter flu).

Evaluation of the Isle of Wight’s expansion of pharmacy led vaccination services revealed 99% of patients rated the service as ok or excellent (with 91% rating it excellent), 98% would use community pharmacy again to be vaccinated, and 93% found the service more accessible than alternatives.³

Patient commentary also focused on how much more convenient it was to attend the pharmacy than queue in a GP surgery, as well as an appreciation of avoiding a perceived infection risk from spending long periods of time at the GP practice.

Minor Ailments Service

The Minor Ailments Service was introduced into Northern Ireland in 2005, and referral onto the scheme includes direct referral from GP practices, the community pharmacist or self-referral by the patient.

Under this service, the pharmacist can supply medicine for the treatment of certain minor ailments, free of charge, to suitable patients. The Minor Ailments Service worked well. The Forum recommends extending the scope of the minor ailments scheme in community pharmacy, enabling pharmacists to prescribe prescription and over the counter medicines to treat minor conditions.

Healthy living pharmacies

The Forum would encourage the Department to look at the excellent results being achieved in England through the Healthy Living Pharmacy (HLP) Model and support the work of the HSCB in forming a Health Improvement Alliance to address public health needs through pharmacy.

The development, initially by Portsmouth PCT, of HLPS has provided a mechanism for formalising the delivery of public health services from community pharmacy, and includes the development of training competences for pharmacy staff.

Fundamentally the HLP model creates a commissioning framework that brings together a range of public health services including smoking cessation, weight management, Emergency Hormonal Contraception provision, blood pressure monitoring, Medicine Use Reviews and minor ailments services. HLP also raises public awareness of pharmacy expertise and actively shares learning between sites.

Over the past year, the HLP programme has been rolled out through a pathfinder project to over 30 PCT areas, covering a wider range of demographics. Over 230 pharmacies have now received the HLP quality mark in this programme.

Locally, campaigns promoting HLPS have increased the brand awareness by the local population of accredited HLP pharmacies as deliverers of public health as well as medicine-based services.

Medicines management

The Forum consider there is greater scope for expanding the practice of medicines education prior to discharge from secondary care, and that it should therefore be considered for expansion within the objectives of the review.

Discharge counselling is an important means of teaching patients about how to properly use their medications, and thereby improve their outcomes, reduce unnecessary readmission and reduce medicines wastage.

During the counselling session, the pharmacist reviews with the patient what the medication is used for; how to properly take the medication; and potential side effects that may occur. The use of enhanced medicines management schemes in community pharmacy should be considered.

Models for the group to consider in this area include the new Discharge Medicines Review service in Wales and the New Medicines Service in England, which also provides a great example of what pharmacy, can offer and learnings should be taken on board.

Pharmacy can take a lead role in ensuring medicines optimisation and adherence makes a real difference.

Transforming your care

We ask the review team to consider the impact that other pieces of work namely the consultation into the implementation of Transforming Your Care and the review of the community pharmacy strategy ‘Making it Better.’

Transforming your Care is a major driver in the development of Health and Social Care reform for the next five years and makes a number of recommendations related to expanding the role of pharmacy. The Forum believes there is scope to reflect the recommendations in this report and develop particular commitments and milestones set out in ‘Fit and Well’.

Conclusion

This submission is intended to give a flavour of the potential of what can be achieved if pharmacy is better integrated into public health policy planning and long term strategy.

We urge the department to explore fully the potential of community pharmacy to tackle ongoing public health issues and to use the best practice that exists to develop innovative and effective services for people in Northern Ireland.

The Forum would be willing to discuss its response to this consultation with you. The Forum would also be pleased to supply any further evidence that may be required in support of the points made in our submission.

Yours Sincerely,

Mrs. Anne McAlister
Chair of the Pharmacy Forum