

Background

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) is the professional membership body for GPs in the UK. Our purpose is to encourage, foster and maintain the highest possible standards in general medical practice.

We support GPs through all stages of their career, from medical students considering general practice, through training, qualified years and into retirement. In addition, we set the standards for competency through our examination process.

RCGPNI represents more than 1,500 GPs, more than 75% of GPs in Northern Ireland.

Consultation response

RCGPNI welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation. General practice pharmacists are an integral part of the Multidisciplinary team in general practice and are a valuable resource to practice teams. Given the pressure with rising demand in GP surgeries and the need to find solutions to prevent the collapse of general practice, the development of A Vision for General Practice in Pharmacy in Northern Ireland is timely.

We welcome the fact this strategy has sought to clarify the roles and responsibilities of general practice pharmacists. Our members working across Northern Ireland would advise that the functions and role vary from practice to practice and there is a concern that this will lead to inequity in service provision for patients. Having a standardised regional set of responsibilities would lead to a more equitable service.

We welcome that developing an attractive and viable career pathway for general practice pharmacists is also a key part of this strategy. We would suggest it may be helpful if there is dedicated time in the pharmacy undergraduate curriculum spent in general practice with a GP pharmacist, in addition to the more traditional roles in community and secondary care. We believe this would increase exposure and encourage students to consider GP pharmacy as a viable career. We believe that it is essential that there is resource dedicated to providing training and ongoing learning for general practice pharmacists.

We also note the use of the word consultant in recommendation three and we would respectfully urge caution on this. Considerable work has been undertaken by RCGP towards defining the role of a GPⁱ, describing GPs as consultants in primary care. The use of this term in respect of pharmacists is likely to cause confusion for patients and healthcare staff alike.

RCGPNI would urge the Department of Health to clarify the introduction of Pharmacy Technicians in general practice and we suggest this requires some significant thought and engagement. While these roles may bring benefits to our patients in terms of access and continuity of care, it is essential that some issues are addressed. These issues include concerns around the unregulated nature of the profession and who would employ and fund the technicians? There are major issues surrounding GP premises, with many not fit for purpose, in a state of poor repair and simply not large enough to house current team members. Crucially, issues around supervision, funding, employment status and who has the ultimate responsibility for these staff must be addressed. Our GPP colleagues must be given adequate training and time to provide safe supervision, while balancing the demands of the GPP job.

In summary, we welcome the opportunity to respond to this strategy and we are supportive of general practice pharmacy being properly resourced, to allow this career pathway to flourish and be a vital resource for both GP practices and patients.

ⁱ <https://www.rcgp.org.uk/about>