

Pharmacy Act Unveiled to Waterford by New Regulator

The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) unveiled the Pharmacy Act, 2007, to Waterford and the South East region in an information briefing at the Ramada Viking Hotel last week with industry professionals and patients on the new regulations that have come into force.

The PSI registrar, Ambrose McLoughlin gave the central presentation to the audience on what the regulation will mean for Waterford Pharmacies and patients in city and county.

Mr McLoughlin, accompanied by PSI President, Brendan Hayes, took questions from Waterford Community and Retail Pharmacists on the constitutionality of the legislation, the financial impact and the effect on the working lives of those working in the industry.

The regulatory body, which replaced the organisation of the same name this year, came into force under the Pharmacy Act, 2007 and the legislation, by the Department of Health and Children, will make the PSI the chief regulator of all pharmacies, both community and retail, as well as professionals and assistants.

The audience in attendance were given an opportunity to ask questions to the Registrar and President of the PSI and many of the questions led to concerns about the financial aspect to the registration process, the constitutionality and due process of the legislation and the impact on professional standards.

The presentation emphasised partnership with the profession but also being firm in its direction that the legislation will mean that all pharmacists and pharmacy owners will have to register with the new PSI regulatory body and meet the standards that it has set out such as fitness to practice, an open and public complaints procedure for members of the public as well as the prospect of pharmacists being subject to regulatory inspections.

The registrar of the PSI Ambrose McLoughlin, spoke to Waterford Today Newspaper on why the legislation has been brought about. He said before the presentation: "The public out there are entitled to know that they are safe and that their families who are patients are safe and that they are getting the best quality care and treatments in the best quality locations. Its about patients".

On why these information evenings, which there are many more to come, USI registrar Ambrose McLoughlin said: "It is to introduce the new PSI to the sector and to members of the public. We're here tonight to tell people who we are. We are in a changed role; to tell them how we will be rolling out this legislation and how we expect them to work in partnership with us to meet the requirements in terms of standards that are going to be specified in the process".

Mr McLoughlin added: "This would be the first time in the history of the state that a government has put patients safety and public protection at the centre of policy making. What the last government did, they brought forward the first piece of

pharmacy legislation in 132 years. The first piece of medical practitioners legislation in over 30 years…".

On what took so long for the legislation to take place, The PSI Registrar said: "I think the reason for that was the Oireachtas was never pro-active in this area. I think the Neary case in the Lourdes in Drogheda…. These were all major incidents where patients suffered and where government became concerned about the legislative back-up for dealing with the issues. I think they were the issues that stimulated interest. I also believe that issues like MRSA as well".

Ambrose McLoughlin then added: "Once we have every pharmacy registered, as we will by the early new year, we will have a team of inspectors with an investigating team who will be able to visit every pharmacy in the country and will be able to enforce the proper regimes in respect to the supply and dispensing of medicines…. What you are seeing in Ireland now is, government saying ‘patient safety and public protection are going top of the agenda’…".

The new PSI replaced the old body which was entirely encompassed by practicing pharmacists but the new regulatory body of 21 people will include pharmacists, patient organisations, academics and even law enforcement professionals in its council. On this Ambrose McLoughlin said: "We are moving from an era of self regulation to professionally led regulation where the professions and their regulators are going to be held accountable to the people through the Oireachtas and through their Parliament and that is the big change…".

Darragh O’Loughlin of The Irish Pharmaceutical Union (IPU), a representative body for pharmacists in Ireland said that the IPU welcomes the legislation and that his organisation lobbied for legislation that will bring both professionals and owners into the regulatory framework.

However, Mr O’Loughlin also said that he hopes that the registration process, under which all pharmacists must register with PSI, will be handled in an evenhanded and cost-effective manner and that registration fees are not any higher than they have to be.

According to PSI president Brendan Hayes, The PSI will be moved on to Cork, Sligo Galway, Limerick and Tullamore during the month and the new regulator is likely to face more concerned questions from its somewhat nervous practitioners.