

# COMMUNITY PHARMACY...THE BEST KEPT SECRET

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### BACKGROUND

Around 123,000 people, 9% of the population, visit community pharmacies in Northern Ireland every day.

Every day community pharmacies carry out many valuable healthcare interventions which benefit both patients and the health service. However many of these interventions are not routinely recorded. CPNI designed this survey in an attempt to uncover, collect and record, for the first time, some of these valuable unseen interventions over a one week period.

### SURVEY DESIGN

Early September 2016 community pharmacies in Northern Ireland were contacted by CPNI and invited to take part in the survey.

Interventions were divided into two categories, Medicines Optimisation and Health and Wellbeing, with pharmacists asked to classify the reason for each intervention as likely or unlikely to cause harm.

### SURVEY PERIOD

Community pharmacies were asked to collate all relevant interventions over a one week period from **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2016 to Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2016 (inclusive)**. The deadline for responses was 5<sup>th</sup> October 2016.

### SURVEY SAMPLE

223 completed survey forms were received equating to a 42% response rate. A similar number of responses were received from multiple (n= 119, 53%) compared to independent pharmacies (n=104, 47%). This constitutes a representative sample of the NI community pharmacy network.

### OUTSIDE SCOPE OF SURVEY

It is important to note that interventions or advice occurring as part of a service commissioned already from community pharmacies e.g. smoking cessation, medicines use reviews, repeat dispensing and the minor ailments scheme are NOT included in this survey. Interventions relating to patients in receipt of compliance support have also been excluded.

### SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY

Overall a total of 127,091 interventions were recorded over the one week period by the 223 pharmacies taking part in the survey. This can be extrapolated to:

- **Over 15 million interventions per year** across the community pharmacy network
- **Over 300,000 interventions per week** across the community pharmacy network
- **Over 50,000 interventions per day** across the community pharmacy network
- **Almost 100 interventions every day per pharmacy**
- **Around 10 interventions per hour per pharmacy**

Over 2.5 million were clinical interventions, with a further 9 million interventions related to prescription supply and over 4 million interventions to improve health and wellbeing.

Almost 30% of survey interventions were judged as “likely to prevent harm”, meaning an estimated **4.4 million** interventions preventing patient harm are made by the Northern Ireland community pharmacy network every year.

## DISCUSSION

This survey provides a snapshot of the diversity and often unseen side to the profession but it is just the tip of the iceberg, community pharmacies can and want to do so much more. No other health care resource combines the provision of a range of commissioned services with such a wide spectrum of opportunistic interventions, all without an appointment.

This survey supports the view of community pharmacy as the **safety net of primary care**, the evidence suggests up to **4.4 million** critical interventions are made by pharmacies in Northern Ireland every year which are likely to have prevented harm to patients, equating to an average of over 8,000 interventions per pharmacy.

There are many dimensions to the services provided by community pharmacy and people who are unfamiliar with this environment often do not fully appreciate how each function works synergistically. The combination of a core dispensing service, together with over the counter medicine supply, a wider retail function, a skilled workforce and an open access design, together create a perfect environment for opportunistic interventions with large numbers of people. This unique mix of clinical expertise and accessibility, provides a platform on which to expand and build a more cohesive range of patient-centred services, focusing not only on clinical services which maximise the pharmacist’s role as the medicines expert but also on prevention and early intervention, working upstream to help patients stay well and prevent illness wherever possible.

While some of the numbers quoted may seem large, it is worth remembering that these are likely to be an underestimate as many pharmacists in their responses told us they simply did not have the time to record all interventions, particularly during busier periods.