



NEWS RELEASE

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Competition Authority Identifies Necessary Reforms in GP Services

The Competition Authority has today published the first two parts of its report on General Medical Practitioners. The report identifies solutions to improve the supply of GPs in Ireland and to facilitate advertising by GPs.

According to Declan Purcell, Director of the Competition Authority's Advocacy Division, *"GP services are a vital part of the health system. The cost of visiting a GP has risen much faster than inflation and people are delaying GP visits. Increasing the supply of GPs quickly, and raising awareness of the services available and their prices, should go some way towards improving access to GP services."*

Training

Ireland is facing a shortage of GP services. The Competition Authority has identified a bottleneck in GP training that is contributing to this problem. Currently doctors wishing to become GPs must undertake four years of specialised training in addition to their medical degree; two years hospital training and two years training in a GP practice. GP training programmes do not recognise previous hospital training and experience and some GP trainees end up repeating certain training.

The Competition Authority has recommended that doctors who have relevant hospital training and experience should, subject to a short orientation course, be allowed proceed immediately to the two years training in a general practice. This will result in more GPs being trained as quickly and as cheaply as possible and help alleviate predicted shortages in GP services.

Advertising

GPs have traditionally not been allowed to advertise. For example, a new GP practice could not distribute leaflets advertising their services or prices. The Competition Authority advocated to the Medical Council that unnecessary restrictions on truthful and informative advertising by GPs should be removed. New Medical Council Guidelines, published in November 2009, have removed these restrictions on advertising.

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The Competition Authority
An tÚdarás Iomaíochta

GPs are now free to advertise their services and their prices. If GPs respond to this development patients should start to see more information about the services available to them and how much they can expect to pay.

- ENDS -

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

The Competition Authority is publishing its report on General Medical Practitioners in three parts:

- Part I provides an overview of the GP profession and supply and demand for GP services;
- Part II deals with restrictions on the number of qualifying GPs and advertising by GPs; and,
- Part III, to be published in 2010, will report on the GMS system for GP services.

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