



**Competition Authority Recommends Changes to Improve GP Services for Patients**

The Competition Authority has today published a report setting out recommendations for changes in the General Medical Services (GMS) system which would benefit patients by allowing for increased competition between GP practices. It found that competition between GP practices is restricted by certain features of the GMS system.

A GMS contract is very valuable to a GP practice; very few GP practices operate without one. The GMS system favours existing GP practices and protects them from competition from newly qualified GPs. This limits the number of GP practices in Ireland.

The changes proposed by the Authority should lead to improved choice and quality of service for both private and public patients as well as helping the State to secure value for money in purchasing GP services for public patients.

The recommendations are:

1. Access to GMS contracts should be opened up to all qualified GPs.
2. GPs in possession of a GMS contract should be free to set up in, or move to, the location of their choice.
3. Decisions to award a GMS contract in a particular area should not have to take account of the viability of GPs already practising in the area.
4. The interview system for awarding GMS contracts should no longer favour GPs who already have a GMS contract over those who don't. The current marking system awards more points to GPs who already hold a GMS contract.
5. Payments to GPs under the GMS should not be decided on the basis of agreement with the Irish Medical Organisation (IMO), but should be decided by the Minister for Health and Children, following consultation with GPs, and the IMO, if desired.

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## The Competition Authority

An tÚdarás Iomaíochta

Commenting on the report, Chairperson of the Competition Authority, Declan Purcell, said, *"These are win-win-win recommendations; patients, newly-qualified GPs and the State can benefit from these changes."*

The report is available on the Competition Authority website at [www.tca.ie](http://www.tca.ie).

### **NOTES TO THE EDITOR**

The GMS system ensures GP services are provided free-of-charge to 1.6 million "public patients", eg medical card holders and GP visit card holders, throughout the State. This represents approximately one third of the population. The remaining 66% are "private patients" who pay for their GP visits.

This report is the third part of a three part report on General Medical Practitioners. Parts one and two, which were published in December 2009, examined the supply of and demand for GP services in Ireland and identified restrictions on competition resulting from bottlenecks in GP training and prohibitions on advertising by GPs. Recommendations for change in both of those areas were put forward in those reports. All three reports are available on the Competition Authority website at [www.tca.ie](http://www.tca.ie).

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