



Message from project leads

It's been a challenging and incredibly rewarding journey and we've been very privileged to have the opportunity to bring about positive change for so many people. We're delighted with the way the project is developing, and it's been great to see pharmacists and healthcare professionals upskill and learn how to optimise medicines prescriptions with the 7 steps review process.

The event in Monaghan was an absolute success in terms of sharing the iSIMPATHY journey to date and the opportunity to provide face-to-face training for local healthcare professionals (HCPs).



Alpana Mair, iSIMPATHY SRO and Head of Effective Prescribing and Therapeutics, Scottish Government
Ciara Kirke, Clinical Lead for the National Medication Safety Programme, Health Service Executive
Mike Scott, Director, Medicines Optimisation Innovation Centre (MOIC), NI.

Shared Learning Event

A very successful iSIMPATHY shared learning event took place in November, in the Hillgrove Hotel in Co Monaghan. Alongside the great variety of invited speakers, there were testimonies from patients who have received a medicine review through the iSIMPATHY project and the positive impact this has had on them and their families. It was found that medicine reviews improve patient safety and patient and carer understanding and empowerment.

Stuart in Donegal who is a carer for both his parents said: **"The medication changes suggested/actioned alongside the GPs has been extremely helpful. It's made a huge difference to their quality of life and to us as a family, knowing they are at less risk of falling and can live a more independent life, requiring less care from me."**

The project is training healthcare professionals who will deliver effective medicine reviews until the end of March 2023. It delivers the key principles of the **WHO Third Global patient safety challenge**, Medication Without Harm. The project is delivering a systems approach that is scalable through cross-border shared learning. Dr. Majella Grealish, Co. Donegal said, **"This is the single most important change in our practice since we were established over 20 years ago"**



Shared Learning Event (cont'd)

Service user Bernadette, from Co. Cavan said, **“This is the best thing to come into my life in a while. It is absolutely great, I was floundering as I’m on so many medications and I was lost.”**

Also discussed was Polypharmacy, which is the use of multiple medicines and represents a growing public health challenge. Taking multiple medicines may be the most appropriate action, however the potential issues are:

- increased risk of harm from interactions between drugs or between drugs and diseases outweighing intended benefits
- detrimental impact on patients’ quality of life
- medicines prescribed not having intended benefits, with up to 50% of patients taking four or more medicines not taking them as prescribed
- economic impact in service demand and hospitalisation
- complex systems of health and social care can lead to a lack of collaboration across the different care settings

The event also heard from Dr. Amanda Lavan, who presented ‘Towards making Ireland the best place in the world to grow old’ and shared findings from the TILDA study (The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing). We also had Prof. Kathleen Bennett who presented on ‘Polypharmacy in older populations-evidence and implications’ which led to discussions on medicines optimisation in GP practices. Pharmacists work as part of the team in the GP practice to provide medicinal reviews to patients who are highly complex and require ongoing reviews to maintain their care and prevent admissions to hospital while also reviewing new patients.

The overall aim of the project is to improve the health and wellbeing of people with Chronic Disease who are at a higher risk of medication related harm. Therefore, it is nice to hear from another service user saying, ‘it is the first time anyone ever listened and understood what I was coping with and helped me in so many ways.’

Attendees received the event very positively with the majority agreeing that the day had been a very successful and engaging event.

Healthcare professionals training:

Following the Shared Learning Event, Dr. Alpana Mair, iSIMPATY SRO and Head of Effective Prescribing and Therapeutics at Scottish Government and Dr. Martin Wilson, Consultant Geriatrician at NHS Highlands, Scotland, delivered an in person training session on Evidence based polypharmacy reviews and the 7 steps process. Over 30 healthcare professionals attended the training which equips them to undertake comprehensive person-centred medicines reviews. The session was really positive, Alpana said that **‘It was great to have a diverse multi-professional group which invoked such a good discussion on clinical and practical implementation in Ireland.’**

Alpana and Martin are delivering another training session on the 11th January 2023, organised with the support of NHS Dumfries & Galloway and will be a hybrid event.



iSIMPATHY in Prague:

Our iSIMPATHY team (pictured) took centre stage at the ESCP 50th Symposium in Prague in October. Highlights included iSIMPATHY Lead Alpana Mair chairing a round table discussion on the implementation and positive impact of clinical pharmacy services in various settings of care with Matteo Cesari (WHO), Francois- Xavier Lery (EDQM) and Angela Kidd. At the event iSIMPATHY also hosted their first workshop which taught attendees how to apply the 7 steps approach to undertake person centred medication reviews. iSIMPATHY pharmacist's Joanne Brown & Clare Kinahan presented some of the work that has been carried out to date. There were also a number of posters on display for the networking session. A hugely successful and beneficial event to be a part of.



Pharmacist's Reflections:

iSIMPATHY – What matters to me?

Emma Jane Coyle,

iSIMPATHY Project Pharmacist, HSE, Donegal, Republic of Ireland

I really enjoy being a pharmacist and what I love most is talking to my patients. I say 'my' because that is how I feel about the people I meet through my work as an iSIMPATHY pharmacist. I (proverbially) 'take them under my wing' and try not to let them go again until I have addressed that all-important question "what matters to you?"

At this point in the project, it is time to draw a breath and step back from my patients. It is time to reflect on iSIMPATHY and ask myself "What matters to me?"

Prior to iSIMPATHY I worked as a pharmacist in a busy community pharmacy in Templeogue, Dublin for 12 years. In August 2020, myself and my family left the 'Big Smoke' behind and returned to my home place of Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal. Exciting as it was to return to my roots, this move was symbolic of me leaving any opportunity for career expansion behind. I had decided I would work as Locum Pharmacist and I was relatively content with that. Alas, that all changed when I opened an email from HSE Talent Pool and there in front of me lay an opportunity – application was open for pharmacists to apply for a role in the iSIMPATHY project, in none other than DONEGAL!

Fast forward to November 2020 and there I was in post as a "Senior Pharmacist with the iSIMPATHY Project for Donegal." It is important to point at this stage that iSIMPATHY is extra special here in ROI, in comparison to Northern Ireland or Scotland. This is because iSIMPATHY represents the first time, outside of a research setting, that pharmacists are working in GP surgeries. It is the first time that our profession has been granted access to full patient records and to work with the patients and their GPs during the medication review process.



Pharmacist's Reflections - Emma Jane Coyle (cont'd)

This extra special element signifies considerable opportunities and at the same time represents huge responsibilities.

I was the first of the iSIMPATHTY pharmacists to take up post in ROI. I had come from a job that I knew upside down and inside out and suddenly, those comfy old slippers were replaced with Jimmy Choo stilettos – a delight to look at but they most certainly needed breaking in! Suddenly everything in my professional life was no longer black & white and it is safe to say that the majority of us pharmacists are not comfortable living in the grey!

Upon reflection, in my early days in iSIMPATHTY I was a little at sea. I felt a huge burden of making this project successful. I was (and still am) extremely hungry to see the role of pharmacists in GP practices become a mainstay of healthcare here in Ireland as it is in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

However, where would I start? Training with the iSIMPATHTY Project team had only just commenced, we were in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and I didn't even have so much as a laptop to work on! I had attended training modules on the concepts of change management – so I started by creating some urgency surrounding the need for Polypharmacy Medication Reviews and began to form my coalitions - with GPs, Community Pharmacists, Practice Nurses, Public Health Nurses, HSE staff, visiting residential Care Facilities...anyone who was willing to listen to me was approached!

Eventually things settled. The “new girl” had a name; she was Emma, the pharmacist in the surgery, there to conduct Polypharmacy Medicines Reviews. She had skills, she was approachable and she wasn't here to correct errors nor to police prescribing. Rather she was here to provide another level of quality clinical care to patients and she had something nobody else in the practice had – time. My days very quickly started to become very full, my position started to develop and my role was established. At almost two years since first starting, I feel this quote from a GP colleague summarises the appetite for iSIMPATHTY here in ROI:

***“I cannot emphasise enough what a fabulous addition Emma has been to our team.”
“I can say without a doubt that Emma’s appearance in our practice has been the single most important change in our practice in the 20 years since we have been established as a group practice.....”
“I look forward immensely to iSIMPATHTY being rolled out nationally (or at least being continued indefinitely for our practice!)”***

As delightful as it is to read quotes such as the above, they're not the building blocks for government investment in a new health resource. However, interim analysis of iSIMPATHTY here in ROI speaks volumes (available here: <https://www.isimpathy.eu/news/interim-report-interim-analysis-of-the-isimpathy-project-in-the-republic-of-ireland>). Analysis of data from ROI shows that iSIMPATHTY is indeed working. GPs, patients and other healthcare professionals are highly accepting of the role of the practice-based pharmacist. Immense safety issues are being addressed and unnecessary, potentially harmful medicines are being deprescribed in a controlled and supervised manner. Not only this, money is being saved and a net saving of €204 per review was calculated. Based on this evidence, long-term implementation of the iSIMPATHTY approach here is, quite bluntly, a “no-brainer.” And that is quite simply the answer to the question “What matters to me?”

I'm very proud of how far I've come since starting as an iSIMPATHTY pharmacist. My clinical skills have been vastly upgraded and my love of learning has been reignited. I am honoured to work with patients and their families to unravel the puzzle that is all too often associated with their lengthy medicines list. I feel privileged to work as part of a magnificent team of experts – locally, nationally and internationally.

I sincerely hope that this is only just the beginning.

Clare Kinahan
iSIMPATY Project Pharmacist,
Cavan/Monaghan, Republic of Ireland

“I’ve always been a believer in the importance of person centred care and struggled with the fact that strict adherence to disease specific guidance in multi-morbidity can counter it. The person centred 7 step approach appealed greatly to me, so I leaped at the opportunity to deliver iSIMPATY reviews.

However whilst my role as an iSIMPATY pharmacist has been my most rewarding to date, it has also been my most challenging. Time is every healthcare professionals’ enemy, and it is challenging to balance our time between providing a good service and proving that we are providing a good service.

Prescribers lack of time to review the full medication list is part of the reason polypharmacy has become so problematic. To avoid becoming part of the problem we’re trying to address, we iSIMPATY pharmacists need to invest time deep diving into patients’

histories. We need to gather information from multiple sources, consult with multiple prescribers and to really hear and consider the patients lived experience of their medications. All this information needs to be effectively shared to form a plan and follow up is needed to ensure the desired outcomes are being achieved.

To demonstrate achievements, data collection, whilst far from fun, is essential. I am grateful that iSIMPATY doesn’t solely use numeric targets but also Patient Reported Outcome Measures. Counting what counts, rather than only what can be easily counted, helps to keep the focus on the patient. However, numbers do speak, and so I’m also grateful that the Irish data has already shown that we’re saving our strapped health service, more than double what we are costing it.

I sincerely hope that this data will grant us the privilege of continuing to deliver this service, because in life after iSIMPATY I will struggle with trying to review patients’ medications without knowing what matters to them.”

Joanne Brown,
iSIMPATY Project Pharmacist, Northern Ireland

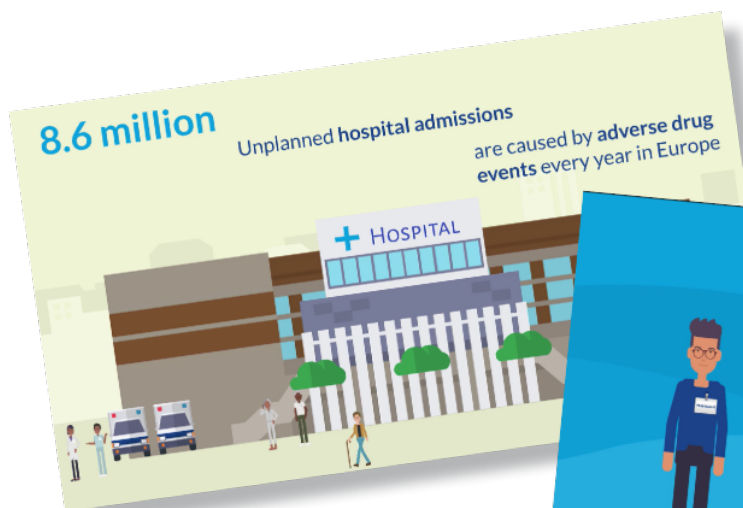
Working on the iSIMPATY project has been such a valuable experience. I have enjoyed getting to know everyone on the project and making new connections and have learned so much from everyone. The opportunity to present our data at ESCP in Prague was very worthwhile and a great opportunity to meet new people and present the project to European colleagues. Carrying out medication reviews with patients following the 7-steps tool feels like a new way of thinking and helps us work with patients to discover what is important to them, helps us empower and educate patients and to ensure that they take the most appropriate medicines. The fact that the patient is at the centre of our reviews provides great benefits for the patient but also great personal and professional satisfaction. The project has allowed us to drive forward what pharmacists can do and has given me new confidence in my interactions with patients and healthcare staff and also in the clinical decisions I make. I’m looking forward to the rest of the project and I know that I will take my new learning and friendships with me when it is finished.



News:

We have launched a new animation on
“the role of the pharmacist”.

Please download and enjoy using the attached link:
<https://vimeo.com/773310438>



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Northern Health
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