

IHS Demands End to Treatment Delay Protest - Press Release February 2013

The Irish Haemophilia Society welcomes the actions of the HSE this week in providing additional pharmacy resources, which should result in an immediate end to a campaign by hospital pharmacists which was preventing people with Hepatitis C from accessing treatment. The Society expect that potentially life-saving treatments for people diagnosed with Hepatitis C will now be dispensed by hospital-based pharmacists, with immediate effect.

There are approximately 10,000 individuals with Hepatitis C in Ireland, of whom 1,000 have been assessed for the two new treatments which were licenced in Ireland in January 2012 and were authorised by the Minister for Health in April of last year. The treatments offer a significant opportunity to cure Hepatitis C in many patients and may prevent progression of liver disease, cirrhosis or premature death. The treatments should be available through seven hospitals where there are specialised hepatology and/or infectious diseases units.

Despite the important medical breakthrough, patients had not been able to access the new treatment in the majority of these hospitals due to the actions of hospital pharmacists who were effectively denying access to the medications to the majority of eligible patients. It is the Irish Haemophilia Society's understanding that the hospitals involved are currently limited to a maximum of four patients on treatment at any one time. Because each treatment episode lasts 12 months, the action by hospital pharmacists was denying the majority of patient's access to treatments that could save their lives.

The Irish Hepatitis C Outcomes Research Network (ICORN), which represents hepatologists and infectious disease specialists who treat Hepatitis C, had called on the pharmacists and the HSE to find an immediate solution to this unacceptable restriction in dispensing treatment.

ICORN chairperson Professor Suzanne Norris, Consultant Hepatologist at St James's Hospital, Dublin, said: "Despite the fact that the treatments are licenced and funding is available, we have been unable to provide adequate Hepatitis C treatment to patients nationally due to the actions of hospital pharmacists."

Professor Colm Bergin, Infectious Diseases Consultant at St James's Hospital, stressed that the important role of pharmacists within the multidisciplinary team structure and treatment stewardship is acknowledged. But he insisted: "The patients must be able to access treatments. This must be our primary concern."

Brian O'Mahony, Chief Executive of the Irish Haemophilia Society and ICORN Group member, commented: "The actions of the hospital pharmacists and their representative organisation, the

Hospital Pharmacists' Association of Ireland, over the past several months, has been preventing patients with Hepatitis C gaining access to treatment and, in our view, this is indefensible."

Mr O'Mahony continued: "As we see it, the pharmacists have been playing games with people's lives. We welcome the fact that the HSE has agreed to put additional pharmacy posts in place with immediate effect. We now demand that hospital pharmacists dispense these medications without further delay. The Irish Haemophilia Society calls on those involved to immediately stop blocking access to Hepatitis C treatments".

The hospitals involved are the Mater, Beaumont, St James's and St Vincent's in Dublin; Cork University Hospital; Galway University Hospital and St Luke's Hospital, Kilkenny.

Pictured at a Press Conference held in the I.H.S office in Dublin 8 are (L to R) Professor Colm Bergin, Mr. Brian O'Mahony, CEO, IHS and Professor Suzanne Norris

For further information contact:

Brian O'Mahony, Chief Executive, Irish Haemophilia Society

Tel: 01-6579900