

**Hon Peter Dunne**

**Associate Minister of Health**



**Speech**

**Opening Address to the Pharmaceutical Society of NZ  
Workforce Forum**

**Wellington Town Hall, Wakefield Street, Wellington  
9am, Friday 9 April**

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to open this significant meeting on Pharmacy Workforce Education, Training and Continuing Professional Development.

It is wonderful to see such a range of participants here today.

All of you have valuable perspectives and a stake in ensuring that the pharmacy profession we train is well equipped to deliver the sorts of care and services envisaged for it as our health system evolves.

I was fortunate enough to open the Pharmacy Council forum on Pharmacist Prescribing last November, and I see today's discussion as a natural progression of the discussion on that day.

I am particularly encouraged to see that the profession is continuing to think about the role of pharmacists and the education and training that will be required in the future to help it fulfil its potential and achieve the most it can for New Zealanders.

It is also important to think about the training needs of pharmacy support staff.

As the roles embraced by pharmacists continue to extend and develop, there needs to be further thinking about how to make better use of pharmacy technicians and assistants.

It is vital that the training of technical staff ensures that they are also competent and confident enough to provide an extended level of service in the future.

As everyone here will know, medicines are an important part of the health system.

This is reflected in the development of the medicines strategy, *Medicines New Zealand*. The outcomes being sought through *Medicines New Zealand* are quality, safety and efficacy; access and optimal use.

Fine words, but what do they mean in simple terms?

We want people to have access to medicines that are safe, of high quality and effective, and we want them to use them in ways that will give them the best possible health outcomes.

The Government remains committed to Medicines New Zealand.

Considerable progress has been made since the Strategy was published in December 2007. Today I am releasing an updated *Medicines New Zealand* Action Plan, which records this progress and identifies the priority areas for action.

I am looking to build on the success of the strategy to date, and will continue to emphasise the central role that medicines play in the health system.

One of the priority areas in the Action Plan is realising the potential of the pharmacists' workforce.

A strong and vibrant pharmacy sector is fundamental to realising the outcomes of *Medicines New Zealand*.

Pharmacists are the profession most qualified to understand the use of medicines.

There are significant gains to be made from making better use of the skill of the pharmacist workforce in meeting patient needs, particularly at a time when there are significant pressures on the health workforce to meeting the challenges that the health system faces.

This was behind my decision in August to host a workshop on realising the potential of the pharmacist workforce.

I have been delighted with the positive response of the sector to that workshop. In particular, it has been encouraging to see discussions taking place with other professional groups, such as general practice and nursing, and I am delighted to see some of these groups here today.

I am also very pleased to see the pharmacy profession embracing the opportunity to unite around a way forward.

I want to make specific mention of the recent decision of pharmacists and GPs to work more closely with the ground-breaking agreement between the Pharmaceutical Society and the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners.

The Memorandum of Understanding to improve medicines use through enhanced and better collaboration is precisely the kind of development we need to see.

I commend both organisations on this development. Looking in to the future, I expect to see the landscape of the health system and pharmacy's place within it, shift.

I expect to see an environment where pharmacists provide services in a better aligned system where, behind the scenes, health services are better linked up – where primary care, DHBs and the Ministry of Health work more closely together.

Pharmacies will be a key part of integrated family health centres where it is likely a patient will see their GP and access many other services all in one location.

Pharmacists will be part of comprehensive services, working with GPs and practice nurses to improve care for people with chronic conditions like diabetes, asthma and heart disease – to help people stay well and keep them out of hospital.

I know that already there are pharmacies which have developed more innovative patient management systems, making it both easier for the patient to keep on top of their care regime, and relieving some of the pressures on GPs.

Pharmacists will also need to play a role in keeping people healthy and supporting the work of GPs and nurses, to encourage people to live a healthy lifestyle – for example, being smokefree, exercising and eating sensibly.

Whanau Ora models of care, where patients and their whanau determine what is in their own best interests when it comes to health and social services will play a key role in our health system.

This will mean pharmacists may need to work in different ways with their patients and communities and it is essential they are competent and flexible enough to do so.

All in all, we are likely to see even greater collaboration between pharmacists and general practitioners, working together as professional equals, which makes the conclusion of the Memorandum all the more significant as a signpost for the future. In the context of this future, robust evaluation of the education and training needs of the whole pharmacy profession is paramount.

How should our undergraduate qualifications be provided?

Should we be exploring more multidisciplinary education?

Who is best equipped to provide skills-based training?

Will pharmacists carrying out advanced services require a post graduate pharmacy qualification or would some other form of training be more appropriate?

Will the current method of education for Pharmacy Technicians still be fit for purpose as technical roles are extended?

These are all tough questions to grapple with – but important to answer. The fact you all here demonstrates a real commitment to finding those answers.

Today you will be hearing from several presenters including pharmacists and technicians talking about their varied roles, as well as workforce capacity, the continuum of medicines management and pharmacy education and training.

You will also participate in several workshop sessions designed to shape a common understanding about the issues and the way forward.

I fully support the efforts of your profession in its thinking about how to make better use of the pharmacist workforce and I can only encourage you all to contribute fully to the discussions today.

Make the most of this opportunity and I wish you all the best for an invigorating day.

Thank you.