



PRESS RELEASE

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The Government has described the Opposition's claim that the repeat prescription system at the Primary Care Centre is at the point of collapse as absolute nonsense.

The Opposition Spokesman for Health, Neil Costa, has used isolated incidents that he says have been brought to his attention, to try and portray a picture of a failed system. His allegation that "were it not for the commonsense and goodwill of chemists the system would have collapsed", demonstrates that either Mr Costa does not understand how the system works, or worse still understands it and has set out to deliberately mislead the public.

The vast majority of patients with chronic illnesses necessarily require periodical check-ups to monitor their disease, usually every six months. Patients are always advised to book their next appointment at front desk as soon as they leave the GP clinic. Because it is only possible to open GP lists for advance bookings 4 months in advance, the PCC team has introduced a system whereby if the GP needs to see a patient beyond the 4 months in which the lists are open, the patient is given an appointment slip and is called at home with an appointment as soon as the lists for those months are opened.

Those patients who for one reason or another fail to make their next appointment when they leave the GP clinic, invariably try to make an appointment at short notice when they realise that they are running out of medication. In some instances, it is not possible to make an appointment at short notice because the GP slots are already booked.

Patients who find themselves in this situation have recourse to the excellent services provided by the Prescription Advisory Unit located within the Primary Care Centre and managed by a qualified Pharmacist who will assist the patient in one of the following ways:

- Provide the patient with one or two prescriptions (depending on the medical circumstances of the patient) until the patient's next appointment;
- Obtain for the patient a prescription and a GP appointment if it is clinically indicated;

- Advise the patient that pharmacies are authorised to dispense 2 weeks of medication in cases where patients are not able to see a doctor within that time-frame.

Managing patients with chronic illnesses is not just a question of popping a repeat prescription in a box for the patient to collect once in a while, which was the system that the Opposition presided over when it was in Government. It might have been convenient for the patient but it was neither a safe or effective practice, with many patients foregoing necessary checkups which are essential in the good management of chronic diseases. In addition, the system lent itself to all sorts of abuse because there was no audit trail or accountability of the number of prescriptions issued.

Whilst it is still open to even further improvements, especially with regard to patients who might not need periodical six-monthly check-ups, the system that we have today, far from being at the point of collapse as is claimed by the Opposition, is a vast improvement in terms of effectiveness, accountability and patient safety to that which existed in the past.