

Pharmacy First Service for Emergency Hormonal Contraception

Project Summary and Key Outcomes

The Pharmacy First Service for Emergency Hormonal Contraception (EHC) was introduced to ensure timely, accessible emergency hormonal contraception and sexual health advice for women and young people across Northern Ireland. The service allows individuals aged 13 and over to receive confidential assessment, counselling and appropriate treatment directly from community pharmacists, without needing a GP appointment.

Between July 2022, when the service commenced, and March 2024 **33,419 consultations were completed across 378 community pharmacies**. The evaluation of the Pharmacy First Service for EHC highlighted challenges with data quality within the service which limited the ability to conduct robust analysis.

Despite these limitations, the service demonstrated strengths in meeting several core objectives. The level of uptake of the service suggested an awareness of the availability of EHC from community pharmacies and over 95% of surveyed users reported receiving comprehensive information about EHC during their consultation. However, findings relating to the appropriateness of EHC supply were mixed. While nearly 90% of patients received Ulipristal Acetate, there were some instances of potentially unsuitable supply.

The evaluation report concluded that while patient satisfaction was high, several service objectives may be overly ambitious given current structures, particularly the lack of formal referral mechanisms from community pharmacy. Key learning points included the need for better data quality, potential revisions to consultation form content, and additional pharmacist training.

Funder

The service was **commissioned and funded by the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) of the Department of Health (NI)**. Evaluation was conducted by the **Medicines Optimisation Innovation Centre (MOIC)**.

Number of Partners

Delivery involved a multi-agency partnership including:

- **378 community pharmacies** providing the service
- **SPPG** – commissioning and oversight
- **MOIC** – evaluation lead
- **CPNI (Community Pharmacy NI)** – sector collaboration
- **GP practices, OOH services and Sexual Health Clinics** – onward referral and safeguarding links

Total core partners: 5, with pharmacies representing the main delivery network.