

Pharmacy of Your Choice – Change and Innovation in Community Pharmacy

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The Malta Chamber of Pharmacists signed the Memorandum of Understanding¹ (MOU) on the Pharmacy of Your Choice Scheme (POYC) and the Pharmacy regulations at a signing conference held at the Auberge de Castille in the presence of the Prime Minister on Saturday, 28th July 2007.



In the Chamber's opinion, the strong foundations for a lasting culture change in the delivery of community pharmaceutical services have been laid.

The agreement is the result of longstanding reports, studies, internationally supported presentations, and discussions and negotiations by the Chamber and its social partners.² The goal was an agreement with the Government on the framework to lay the foundations for the subsequent implementation of the POYC scheme.

It seems to have been difficult for some colleagues, especially those practicing as managing pharmacists but who are not pharmacy owners, to understand this concept but this was the longstanding accepted Chamber strategy as repeatedly approved by its members.

The framework agreement provides for the piloting, and then national roll out of the POYC by community pharmacies in an environment regulated by the agreed Pharmacy regulations.

The objectives of such a framework agreement and of the scheme itself include support for the improved physical organization of community pharmacies (eg. space, storage, computerisation, etc) to accommodate the POYC - including viability and sustainability of pharmacies vis à vis their fundamental role of patient service; this is expected to have a positive domino effect on the working conditions and practice opportunities of the pharmacists practicing in the participant pharmacies.

The detailed implementation of the POYC scheme, pilot and national roll out, were not part of the negotiations and the agreement. These are the subject of the discussions and decisions of the Standing Advisory Committee¹ (SAC), provided for by the MOU.

The Standing Advisory Committee

The Standing Advisory Committee is the practical implementation of the public private partnership established through the signing of the MOU.

The details on the actual phased implementation of the POYC scheme are being discussed and agreed upon in the SAC of which the Chamber is an equal partner. The Committee includes 5 pharmacists, three from the private side and 2 from Government. This enables us to clarify matters with our colleagues in government service and find the best way of moving forward with everyone on board and working together towards best practices. Moreover the partners can invite other pharmacists or other resource persons, in order to acquire the required expertise, according to the matters under discussion.

Since the signing of the MOU, the SAC has met and discussions have been initiated to spearhead the implementation of the POYC pilot, whilst other matters are already being discussed with a view to the national roll out of the scheme.

Adherence by Community Pharmacies to the POYC scheme

The pharmacy owners were informed of the signing of the MOU through

circulars, forwarding of the agreement documents together with the visual presentation made at the signing conference, and electronic contacts to enable 'real time' communication on the POYC and related matters.

Importantly, they also received an invitation to complete consent forms signifying their intention to join the scheme.

As expected, the forwarding of the consent forms catalysed intensive two-way communication between members and the Chamber. This shall be further structured and strengthened and is still ongoing. The Chamber's email address is still receiving many queries which are being discharged accordingly.

The Chamber's website is continuously being updated with publication of documentation, including circulars, announcements and press releases. The site will be further developed, rendering it more dynamic and user-friendly in support of the POYC.

To date, 201 community pharmacies (n=209) have adhered to the POYC scheme. All localities in Malta and Gozo will be well served by these pharmacies. Detailed information gathered in this regard has been passed on to the SAC Chairman, who shall formally submit it to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health.

In the coming days, the SAC chairman shall write to the remaining pharmacies for their final decision on whether to join or opt out of the scheme as provided for in the agreement.

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Introductory Meeting on the POYC

An introductory meeting for the pharmacy owners who have consented to join the POYC scheme, together with their managing pharmacists was held on 27th August 2007. The participants had the opportunity to communicate directly with the chairman and members of the SAC, who clarified several points raised by those present.

The meeting addressed the following matters:

- The signing of the MOU on the POYC and Pharmacy regulations;
- The result to date of the call for consent to participate in the POYC scheme;
- The implementation of the POYC, with special reference to the pilot study;
- Structured visits by members to European countries in order to gain experience on their pharmacy systems. These visits shall be supported by the Leonardo programme and other EU funding programmes;
- Call for interest in contributing to working groups;
- Question and answer;
- Forthcoming meetings.

The Chamber shall hold specific meetings for those member pharmacists participating in the scheme as the preparations for the pilot and national roll out unfold. These will also serve to maintain good communication with different stakeholders. These meetings shall be held regularly in order to professionally support, develop, monitor and evaluate the POYC in the short, medium and long term.

It is also to be noted that the Chamber shall be forming working groups to support its work in the SAC, to contribute directly to the implementation of the pilot study and eventually the national roll out. Given the interest generated amongst pharmacists by the announcements and publications on the POYC, it is expected that many pharmacists will come forward to participate actively in these working groups. A main objective of these

working groups is to establish a strategic network for supporting and mentoring of colleagues to successfully reach the objectives of the POYC.

Moreover, the Chamber recommends that managing pharmacists discuss the POYC with the pharmacy owner and other staff in the pharmacy to foster, as a key to success, a team culture where goals are communicated and shared.³

All pharmacists have been reassured of the Chamber's full support should they encounter any difficulties.

Patient Registration – choice of pharmacy by the patient

The next step to be taken by the SAC is to prepare for the implementation of the Patient registration in the POYC. The Chamber considers this to be central to the whole project. A Patient Registration Form has been under the consideration of the SAC. The form shall consist of 3 sections, to be completed by the patient (section A), the managing pharmacist (section B) and the treating doctor (section C) respectively. This form is envisaged to act as an important and fundamental tool to collect all required data regarding patients participating in the scheme and their medicines. The data collected on medicines is expected to lead to the establishment of Patient Medication Records

The forms shall be collected from the community pharmacies participating in the scheme. The managing pharmacists are invited to guide and support the patient in the proper completion of the form in the best ethical and professional manner and to act as the patient's safeguard, with the Chamber's full support in this regard. Doctors are also invited to cooperate in the completion of the form in the best interest of the patient.

The official patient registration is thus through this specific form, a specimen of which shall soon be issued to doctors and pharmacists by the SAC chairman.

The Pilot Study

It has now been established that the pilot study shall be conducted at the community pharmacies (n=17) in the localities which are served by the Mosta health centre pharmacy. These include Naxxar, Mellieha, Mgarr, St Paul's Bay and Ghargħur. For logistical reasons, residents of Mosta shall continue to be served at the Mosta health centre for the duration of the pilot project.

The SAC has taken a dynamic system approach to the pilot study and is at present working on practical solutions to avoid as many critical points as possible, as total quality management requires.

The main objective remains that of establishing a system with strong logistical organization, robust internal controls and provision for variance (e.g. out of stock items and change of treatment), but which is least labour intensive for pharmacists who shall organize the delivery of a good pharmaceutical care service according to the needs of the patient and the nature of the pharmacy under their management.

The POYC agreement is envisaged to place community pharmacists and their patients on an equal platform to that of European and international counterparts.

All of the above can and shall be undertaken with the Chamber's full support as the pharmacists' national professional organization. □

References

1. Malta Chamber of Pharmacists, Chamber of Small and Medium Enterprises – GRTU Pharmacy section, Government of Malta. Memorandum of Understanding – Pharmacy of Your Choice Scheme and Appendices. 28th July 2007. Archives of the Malta Chamber of Pharmacists.
2. Malta Chamber of Pharmacists. Chronology Of The Chamber's Thrust For The Decentralization Of The Distribution Of NHS Medicines To The Pharmacy Of The Patient's Choice (1987-2007). Archives of the Malta Chamber of Pharmacists.
3. Roberts Alison. The Constant Crossroads – Change Management in Community Pharmacy. Pharmacist 2007; 26(3): 200-6.