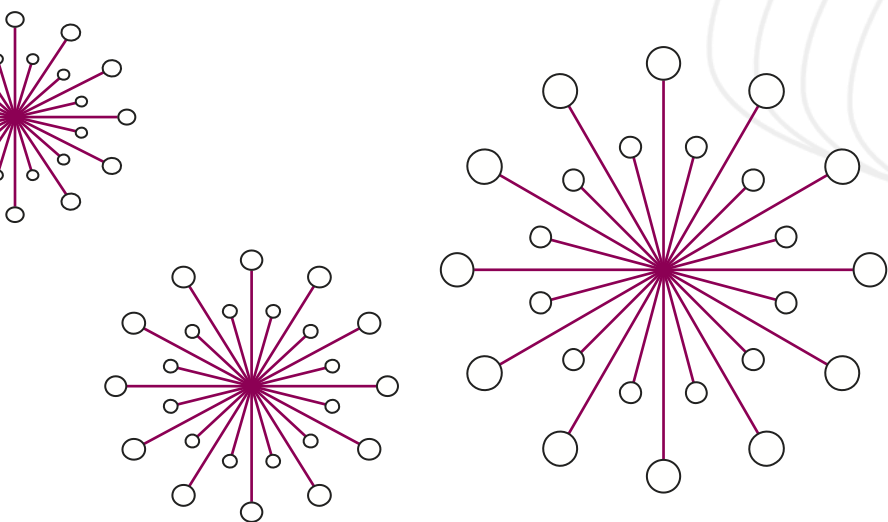


# Professional Standards for Chief Pharmacists in Northern Ireland

August 2025



## © Pharmaceutical Society NI (2025)

The text of this document (excluding the logo and branding) may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium provided it is reproduced accurately and not in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Pharmaceutical Society NI copyright and the document title specified.

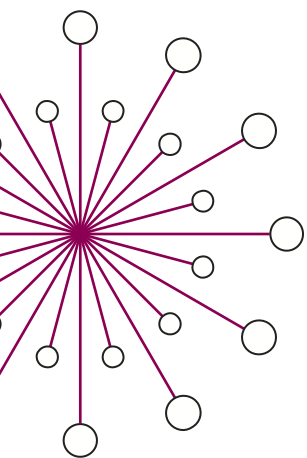
Any enquiries about this publication should be sent to the Pharmaceutical Society NI at:

Address: 73 University Street, Belfast BT7 1HL  
Email: [info@psni.org.uk](mailto:info@psni.org.uk)  
Telephone: 028 9032 6927

This publication is available from our website at [www.psni.org.uk](http://www.psni.org.uk)

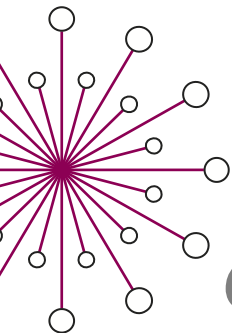
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                                                | Page |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 1. About us.....                                                                                               | 4    |
| 1.1 What we do.....                                                                                            | 4    |
| 2. Introduction.....                                                                                           | 5    |
| 2.1 The Pharmacy (Preparation and Dispensing Errors – Hospital and other Pharmacy Services Order 2022.....     | 5    |
| 2.2 The Chief Pharmacist role.....                                                                             | 6    |
| 2.3 The Standards for Chief Pharmacists.....                                                                   | 8    |
| 2.4 How to demonstrate that the Standards are being met.....                                                   | 9    |
| 2.5 Applying the Standards.....                                                                                | 9    |
| Standard 1: Provide strategic and professional leadership.....                                                 | 9    |
| Standard 2: Develop a workforce with the right skills, knowledge and experience.....                           | 11   |
| Standard 3: Delegate responsibly and make sure there are clear lines of accountability..                       | 13   |
| Standard 4: Maintain and strengthen governance to ensure safe and effective delivery of pharmacy services..... | 14   |
| 3. Conclusion.....                                                                                             | 15   |



# 1. About us

The Pharmaceutical Society NI  
(the Society) is the regulatory  
body for pharmacists and  
pharmacy premises in Northern  
Ireland.



*Our primary purpose is to ensure that  
pharmacists are fit to practise and deliver  
high quality safe care to patients.*

## 1.1 What we do

It is the organisation's responsibility under The Pharmacy (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 to protect and maintain public safety in pharmacy by:

- setting and promoting standards for pharmacists' admission to the Register and for remaining on the Register;
- maintaining a publicly accessible register of pharmacists and pharmacy premises;
- investigating concerns about the fitness to practise of pharmacists and taking action to protect the public;
- ensuring high standards of education and training for pharmacists in Northern Ireland; and,
- providing vital professional leadership functions through the Pharmacy Forum NI.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 The Pharmacy (Preparation and Dispensing Errors – Hospital and Other Pharmacy Services) Order 2022<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this Order is to remove the threat of criminal penalties for inadvertent (accidental or unintentional) preparation and dispensing errors by pharmacy staff working in hospitals and similar settings.

Under the 1968 Medicines Act, there are already ‘defences’ pharmacy professionals can use if they are responsible for an accidental or unintentional preparation or dispensing error.

Since 2018, pharmacy staff working in registered pharmacies have been able to use these defences. The 2022 Order now includes pharmacy staff working in HSC hospitals and certain other pharmacy settings, such as care homes, Area Integrated Partnership Boards, Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS), prisons and other places where people are lawfully detained, as well as some services registered with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) which include:

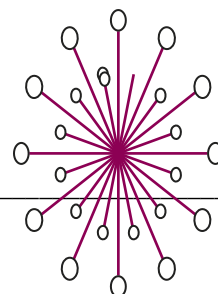
nursing homes; children’s homes; independent hospitals; independent clinics; and hospices.

Including these other pharmacy settings will:

- lead to consistency across the pharmacy sector;
- encourage people to report preparation and dispensing errors; and,
- mean that there is more ‘shared learning’ from errors, which will improve patient safety.

If you are not sure whether you or staff within your organisation are able to benefit from the defences, please ask your organisation’s legal team for advice.

The Order gives the Pharmaceutical Society NI various new powers; one of these is the power to set Professional Standards for Chief Pharmacists, including a description of their professional responsibilities. By producing new Standards, we will clarify the role, responsibilities and accountability of Chief Pharmacists; in turn, this will maintain and strengthen pharmacy governance. Strengthening governance will create a framework where there is a smaller likelihood of preparation and dispensing errors and will nurture a culture where staff feel better able to report any errors and learn from them.



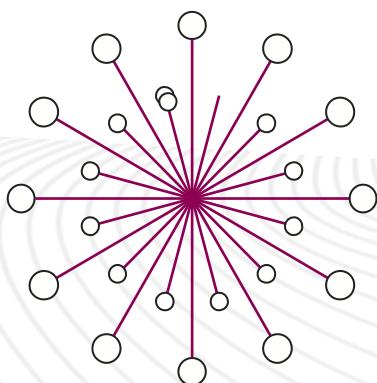
---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2022/851/introduction>

To benefit from the defences set out in the Order, the hospital (or other pharmacy setting listed in the Order) must have a Chief Pharmacist (or equivalent) in post. This must be a registered pharmacist with the appropriate skills, training and experience. If an organisation chooses to have a Chief Pharmacist (or equivalent) in post, the postholder must meet the Standards set out in this document.

The legislation is 'enabling' in its effects, rather than imposing new rules; this means that an organisation can choose not to benefit from the defences, and if so, they will not need to have a Chief Pharmacist (or their equivalent) in post. If that is the case, our Standards for Chief Pharmacists will not apply.

We have created the Standards so that organisations can meet the new legislation. They are not intended to be a complete description of the scope of a Chief Pharmacist's role, which can often be different in the independent and Health and Social Care system across Northern Ireland.



However, we encourage organisations to acknowledge and follow the Standards as part of good practice and to strengthen pharmacy governance.

Developing these Chief Pharmacist Standards is the first part of a programme of work to strengthen pharmacy governance. The programme also includes producing Regulations and Professional Standards for Responsible Pharmacists, as well as Professional Standards for Superintendent Pharmacists.

## 2.2 The Chief Pharmacist Role

Under the 2022 Order, organisations in any of the listed pharmacy settings must have a Chief Pharmacist (or equivalent) in place if they want to benefit from the defences against criminal prosecution, in case of an accidental or unintentional preparation or dispensing error.

The postholder must meet our Professional Standards of conduct, ethics and performance for Pharmacists in Northern Ireland as outlined in the Pharmaceutical Society NI's Code of Conduct, Ethics and Performance, as well as the Professional Standards for Chief Pharmacists.

Pharmaceutical Society NI's Code of Conduct, Ethics and Performance describes how safe and effective care is delivered through professionalism and how pharmacists must treat every person as an individual. The new Standards for Chief Pharmacists build on those Standards, describing the role and responsibilities of Chief Pharmacists, as well as setting Standards of conduct and performance.

Both the Pharmaceutical Society NI's Code of Conduct, Ethics and Performance and the Standards for Chief Pharmacists apply to Chief Pharmacists in whatever setting they work, and even when they do not provide care directly to patients and the public. The attitudes, behaviours, conduct and practice of Chief Pharmacists can indirectly have an impact on the safe and effective care that patients receive and on the confidence of members of the public in pharmacy as a whole.

Chief Pharmacists are senior healthcare professionals responsible for providing leadership, expertise, oversight and management of pharmacy services within an organisation. The role includes:

- planning and allocating resources;
- improving productivity;
- providing value for money; and,
- making sure that pharmacy services meet the needs of the communities they serve and improve health outcomes.

The work of a Chief Pharmacist contributes to the safe, high-quality and effective provision of services in these settings.

It is not necessary to use the title 'Chief Pharmacist'. Other titles, such as Head of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, are often used. If a title other than Chief Pharmacist is used, for the organisation to benefit from the defences the job description must meet:

- the description of a Chief Pharmacist's role given in section 67F (4) of the Medicines Act 1968; and,
- our requirements in these Standards for Chief Pharmacists.

Section 67F (4) of The Medicines Act 1968 sets out the role of the Chief Pharmacist (or equivalent) as someone who:



***a. Plays a significant role***

*(irrespective of whether other individuals also do so) in:*

- i. the making of decisions about how the whole or a substantial part of the activities of the pharmacy service are to be managed or organised; or,*
- ii. the actual managing or organising of the whole or a substantial part of those activities;*

- b. Has the authority to make decisions that affect the running of the pharmacy service as far as concerns the sale or supply of medicinal products; and,***
- c. Is responsible for securing that the pharmacy service is carried on safely and effectively.***

The Chief Pharmacist (or equivalent) must meet these requirements if their organisation wants the pharmacy staff to benefit from the defences. We have built upon these requirements in producing the Standards for Chief Pharmacists. If a Chief Pharmacist does not meet these

Standards, we may investigate concerns about their fitness to practise.

## **2.3 The Standards for Chief Pharmacists**

The Standards for Chief Pharmacists set out their professional responsibilities. They also describe the knowledge, conduct and performance required by a Chief Pharmacist to support the organisation and its staff to deliver safe and effective pharmacy services, including preparing and dispensing medicines.

The Chief Pharmacist plays a vital leadership role in making sure pharmacy services are delivered safely and effectively. Chief Pharmacists must meet the following Standards:

- 1. Provide strategic and professional leadership;**
- 2. Develop a workforce with the right skills, knowledge and experience;**
- 3. Delegate responsibly and make sure there are clear lines of accountability; and,**
- 4. Maintain and strengthen governance to ensure safe and effective delivery of pharmacy services.**



The Standards are designed to be ‘outcome’ focused in acknowledgement of the differing circumstances of pharmacy settings. We do not set out one way of achieving each outcome, instead, we accept that there may be multiple ways of achieving the same outcome. For example, all Chief Pharmacists must develop a workforce with the right skills, knowledge and experience. The outcome or goal is to deliver safe and effective pharmacy services, but how each Chief Pharmacist will achieve this will be dependent on multiple factors, including the services they deliver, the skills, knowledge and experience of their existing team, the resources available to them and so on. Chief Pharmacists should make sure they can show that they are meeting the Standards, while considering the requirements of the setting they work in. The Standards are also a statement of what patients and other people working with Chief Pharmacists can expect of them.

## 2.4 How to demonstrate that the Standards are being met

There are several ways of establishing whether a Chief Pharmacist is meeting the Standards:

- during a regulatory inspection discussion;

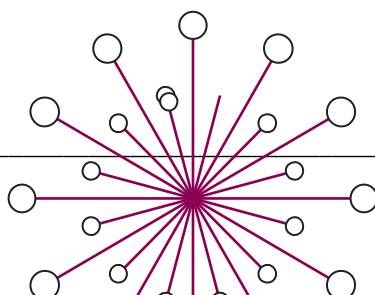
- by referring to the requirements of their role as a Chief Pharmacist when carrying out their revalidation work;
- through investigation, if a concern is raised with the regulator:
  - by a member of staff, a patient or a member of the public; and/or,
  - through inspections or other regulatory actions carried out by the RQIA; and,
- during the regular performance reviews with their line manager.

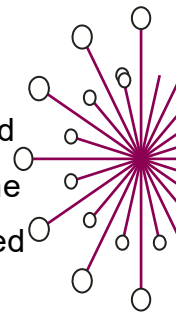
## 2.5 Applying the Standards

### Standard 1: Provide strategic and professional leadership

We have developed the Standards to apply to all Chief Pharmacists, whatever setting they work in. Although Chief Pharmacists may not provide care directly to patients and the public, as noted, their actions have an impact on the safe and effective care that patients and the public receive, and on the confidence that members of the public have in pharmacy.

Chief Pharmacists are personally accountable for meeting the Standards and must be able to justify their conduct and the decisions they make.





Alongside these Standards, as outlined, Chief Pharmacists must also meet the Pharmaceutical Society NI's Code of Conduct, Ethics and Performance. Chief Pharmacists should also follow their organisations' policies and procedures and meet the requirements of, and follow the advice from, other relevant regulatory bodies and inspectorates, such as the RQIA, Medicines Regulatory Group (MRG) and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), as well as any other relevant legislation.

There will be times when Chief Pharmacists are faced with conflicting legal and professional responsibilities; or they may be faced with complex situations that mean they have to balance competing priorities. The Standards for pharmacy professionals and those for Chief Pharmacists provide a framework to help them when making professional judgements. We expect Chief Pharmacists to consider these Standards, their legal duties and any relevant guidance, such as that from the Pharmacy Forum Northern Ireland, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) or other membership bodies, when making decisions, including those covering medicines legislation.

As leaders, Chief Pharmacists play a central role in setting the strategic direction required to deliver safe and effective pharmacy services. It is part of the role of

the Chief Pharmacist to empower and guide pharmacy professionals and the wider workforce in delivering improved outcomes for patients.

Chief Pharmacists must:

- **have a clear vision and strategy to deliver safe and effective pharmacy services across the organisation;**
- **lead by example, taking responsibility for their own professional growth and development;**
- **be able to influence and work collaboratively with others, to meet the needs of patients and contribute to shared organisational and system objectives; and,**
- **promote research, technology and innovation to enhance safety and improve services.**

#### **Examples of how to meet this Standard**

Here are some examples of how Chief Pharmacists can meet this Standard. It is not meant to be a complete list and should be used as a prompt and not as a checklist:

- being able to build effective relationships at all levels, both inside and outside the organisation and across organisational boundaries;

- building and developing partnership working with stakeholders inside and outside the organisation;
- meeting organisational priorities and demonstrating that they are keeping to key organisational policies, such as raising a concern in the public interest;
- making sure staff understand their impact and the wider impact of pharmacy on patients;
- being able to solve problems in high-pressure situations;
- being able to analyse and interpret complex data and information when making decisions;
- demonstrating good decision-making skills that positively affect how pharmacy services are delivered;
- being able to adapt and innovate to meet the changing needs of patients and changes to how pharmacy services are delivered;
- keeping up to date with developments in the pharmacy sector and applying any relevant learning to their organisation;
- developing and supporting a culture of research and innovation;
- providing clinical leadership in the sourcing and management of medicines across the organisation;
- providing professional support and expert pharmacy advice to colleagues; and,

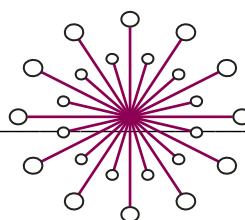
- commenting on the requirements of their role when carrying out their annual Continuing Professional Development.

## **Standard 2: Develop a workforce with the right skills, knowledge and experience**

In order to deliver high-quality, efficient and safe pharmacy services, with positive outcomes for patients, staff must have the right skills, knowledge and experience. As part of their overall responsibility, Chief Pharmacists must make sure that the pharmacy workforce receives the necessary development and training; they must also put 'succession planning' in place, so that team efficiency does not suffer when staff move on.

Chief Pharmacists must:

- **be aware of what skills, knowledge and experience are needed to deliver safe and effective pharmacy services in their settings;**
- **make the best use of resources, and get the right skill mix in each team to deliver safe and effective pharmacy services;**



- **support and value staff and consider their health and wellbeing;**
  - **create and maintain a culture of equality, diversity and inclusion where:**
    - **people (including staff, patients and the public) are treated as equals, with dignity and respect;**
    - **staff meet their own legal responsibilities under equality and human rights legislation, while respecting diversity and cultural differences;**
  - **make sure staff in their organisation know who the Chief Pharmacist is;**
  - **let staff know that they can benefit from the defences, as long as certain conditions are met;**
  - **promote a culture where staff feel safe to report errors/near misses and can learn from them; and,**
  - **make sure that staff are aware of, and meet, any relevant legislation and Standards, as well as the Standards and guidance set by other regulators and membership bodies.**
- 
- Examples of how to meet this Standard**
- Here are some examples of how Chief Pharmacists can meet this Standard. It is not meant to be a complete list, and should be used as a prompt and not as a checklist:
- being aware of the skill mix of each team, making sure that gaps are identified and the necessary actions taken;
  - developing recruitment and retention strategies, as well as succession planning, to deal with any workforce or staffing issues;
  - keeping up-to-date education and training plans that support the workforce in their ongoing development, including when innovation and new technologies are introduced;
  - encouraging staff to work collaboratively, including as part of integrated and multi-disciplinary teams;
  - helping to protect the rights of individuals;
  - promoting equal opportunity for staff, patients and the wider public;
  - helping to improve the experience and healthcare outcomes of patients and members of the public who use their organisation's pharmacy services;
  - building organisational policies and procedures into team management practices – for example, around EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) training, such as, that on building 'cultural competence';
  - showing leadership in delivering inclusive care and reducing health inequalities, promoting equality of opportunity and

challenging discriminatory behaviours, across all interactions with patients, colleagues and the wider public;

- developing a culture where staff feel confident and supported in challenging behaviours such as discrimination, bullying and harassment;
- making sure systems are in place so that the workforce can provide feedback and suggestions, and contribute to the development of and changes in the pharmacy service;
- identifying good practice and sharing it with all relevant staff;
- making sure staff have regular development reviews and that any development needs are met; and,
- developing a culture where staff feel confident about raising concerns. There is a professional responsibility to be open and honest with patients when something goes wrong with their treatment or care which causes, or has the potential to cause, harm or distress.

### **Standard 3: Delegate responsibly and make sure there are clear lines of accountability**

Chief Pharmacists have wide-ranging responsibilities and often need to delegate to make sure services are delivered safely and

effectively; to make sure that this happens Chief Pharmacists must delegate responsibly. As senior leaders, when delegating, Chief Pharmacists are responsible and accountable for making sure the lines of accountability are clear. Details of delegation must be recorded, including who is responsible and

accountable. This will reduce errors and foster a culture of transparency and accountability. If pharmacy staff are to continue to benefit from the defences, a pharmacy setting must make sure that if a Chief Pharmacist leaves the organisation, a replacement or an interim Chief Pharmacist is in post.

Chief Pharmacists must:

- **provide clarity about the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the pharmacy workforce;**
- **carry out appropriate risk assessments and only delegate to people who have the relevant skills, knowledge and experience, and who are confident about assuming the extra responsibility; and,**
- **communicate effectively and record delegation decisions accurately.**

### Examples of how to meet this Standard

Here are some examples of how Chief Pharmacists can meet this Standard. It is not meant to be a complete list and should be used as a prompt and not as a checklist:

- being able to successfully manage and lessen clinical, safety, financial and reputational risk;
- making sure risk assessments are carried out and that relevant staff are consulted/involved;
- making sure that risk assessments are reviewed when needed, for example, if any changes take place;
- allowing staff to refuse a delegated task if they have a good reason, for example, if they feel the task is outside their scope of practice; and,
- making sure staff are aware of their responsibilities and the reporting structure.

## Standard 4: Maintain and strengthen governance to ensure safe and effective delivery of pharmacy services

Establishing clear governance, then maintaining and strengthening it, is a key part of the Chief Pharmacist's role. It involves several aspects, such as having arrangements for managing risks and overseeing how pharmacy services are managed. To demonstrate that they are

meeting this Standard, Chief Pharmacists must communicate effectively at all levels and take a strategic approach when making decisions that affect how pharmacy services are delivered and organised.

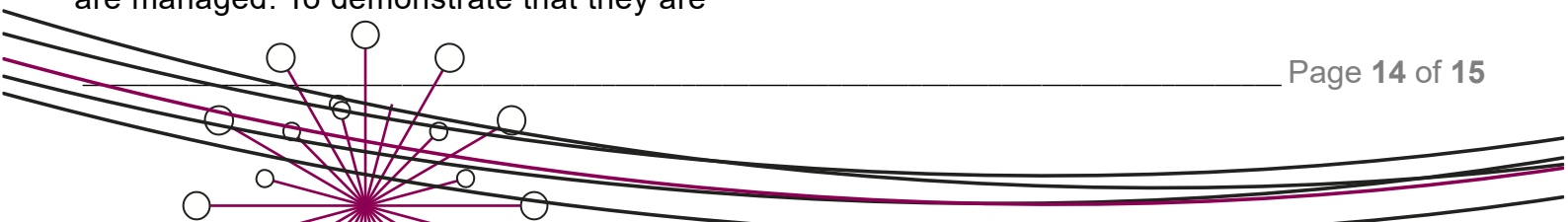
Chief Pharmacists must:

- **have oversight of, and make sure that there is effective management of, all pharmacy services and staff;**
- **establish and communicate clear lines of reporting; and,**
- **make sure there is a process to get feedback, which includes feedback about interventions, errors and incidents, and that the process is reviewed regularly and appropriately managed.**

### Examples of how to meet this Standard

Here are some examples of how Chief Pharmacists can meet this Standard. It is not meant to be a complete list and should be used as a prompt and not as a checklist:

- reviewing governance procedures regularly, including Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and having oversight of how the pharmacy is run and how services are delivered;





- making sure necessary records are kept and are up to date and accurate;
- making sure that an effective records management system is in place and that relevant staff are trained in how to use it;
- carrying out robust performance measurement and reporting, and making changes when needed;
- having oversight of, and contributing to, the development and review of policies;
- having systems in place to anticipate, identify and respond to risks;
- making sure there are systems in place to identify and report errors, including preparation and dispensing errors, and that errors are reviewed and appropriately managed;
- regularly reviewing and acting on internal and external complaints and concerns; and,
- planning and using resources effectively, considering any financial, audit and budgetary requirements.

### 3. Conclusion

The Chief Pharmacist's role is crucial in ensuring the delivery of safe and effective Pharmacy services. By adhering to these Professional Standards, Chief Pharmacists will support their organisations, their staff and the communities they serve in ensuring the safe and effective pharmaceutical care.