

11 September 2024

Professor Lyall Hanton
Convenor of the Review Panel
University of Otago

Sent via email to: m.wilson@otago.ac.nz

Dear Review Panel,

Re: 2024 Review of the School of Pharmacy, University of Otago

The Pharmacy Guild of New Zealand (Inc.) (the Guild) is a national membership organisation representing community pharmacy owners. We provide leadership on all issues affecting the sector and advocate for the business and professional interests of community pharmacy.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input into the review of the University of Otago School of Pharmacy (the School). We recognise the critical role the School plays in shaping the future of pharmacy in New Zealand. This submission highlights several key areas related to workforce challenges in community pharmacy, with recommendations for the School to address in alignment with the terms of reference provided.

1. Workforce shortage and recruitment

The community pharmacy sector is grappling with a significant workforce crisis. While rural areas have long experienced a shortage of pharmacists, this problem has now extended across the entire country, impacting all roles within the pharmacy sector, including pharmacists, technicians, and assistants. The resulting shortage is contributing to severe stress and burnout, with some community pharmacies even closing down due to a lack of qualified staff.

The School of Pharmacy plays a pivotal role in addressing these shortages by ensuring its curriculum meets the evolving needs of the sector. We would like to recommend that the School considers the following:

- **Improve recruitment:** Attract more students by showcasing pharmacy as a dynamic and appealing career choice. To compete with other health disciplines, pharmacy needs a strong image as a rewarding and fulfilling profession. This can be bolstered through proactive engagement with secondary schools, career fairs, and targeted recruitment initiatives. Sector representatives, like the Guild, could lead discussions with prospective students and current students to promote a positive perspective of the profession.
- **Diversity and inclusion:** Increase the recruitment of Māori and Pasifika students to better reflect New Zealand's demographic needs. Addressing cultural safety and community representation is essential for the sector's sustainability. We are keen to explore how we can collaborate with the School to encourage this demographic cohort to consider pharmacy as a career.

2. Retention of early-career pharmacists

Retention of early-career pharmacists is a critical challenge in the sector. Many early-career pharmacists are leaving the profession due to dissatisfaction and a perceived lack of career

advancement, along with remuneration that is not reflective of the level of responsibility. The School of Pharmacy can aid retention efforts by:

- **Defined career development pathways:** Create more defined career development pathways within the pharmacy curriculum. There is a need to offer postgraduate training opportunities that enable pharmacists to enhance their skills without facing the burden of additional responsibilities that lack corresponding remuneration or career advancement.
- **Job satisfaction:** Promote leadership development, entrepreneurship, and expanded roles in healthcare delivery as integral components of the pharmacy curriculum. By empowering pharmacists to operate at the top of their scope and highlighting the benefits of this approach, they can make more significant contributions to the sector, which can help alleviate burnout and enhance job satisfaction.

3. Curriculum and intern pharmacist readiness

There are concerns within the pharmacy sector that recent pharmacy graduates may not always possess the necessary skills required by the workforce. Community pharmacy owners report challenges with interns and newly qualified pharmacists, including those unable to manage sole-charge responsibilities and a noticeable deficit in communication skills. We recommend that the School consider the following:

- **Continuously updating the curriculum:** Ensure that the curriculum reflects the skills required for community pharmacy practice. Pharmacy students should be well-prepared for real-world challenges, particularly in community-based roles.
- **Collaborate on intern pharmacist preparation:** Work closely with the Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand's intern programme to improve the preparation of students for intern pharmacist-level tasks and responsibilities.
- **Emphasise communication and language skills:** Ensure that communication and language skills are a fundamental part of the curriculum. Just as international applicants for New Zealand pharmacist registration must meet specific communication standards, graduates should also be required to demonstrate these skills, rather than assuming New Zealand secondary schools naturally develop them.

4. Addressing workforce flexibility and technological integration

To alleviate workforce pressures, the future workforce should be trained to utilise available technologies that enhance efficiency and patient care. The School can contribute by:

- **Providing training in advanced technology:** Incorporating AI tools and automation into the curriculum to support students to become proficient in these technologies, such as third-party software platforms, robotic dispensing, and all available patient management systems.

5. Practical skills and knowledge of the profession

New pharmacy graduates frequently feel overwhelmed by the complexities of the New Zealand community pharmacy funding system, the Pharmac tender-based drug acquisition scheme, and the additional training and accreditation requirements needed to work in community pharmacy settings. We recommend that the School:

- **Add practical skills to the curriculum:** Incorporate fundamental concepts to critical areas of community pharmacy practice, including the Health New Zealand community

pharmacy contract and funding system, Pharmac's role, and the accreditation processes for providing additional patient services. This will better prepare graduates for their roles in community pharmacy.

If you have any questions about our response, please contact our Senior Advisory Pharmacists, Martin Lewis (martin@pgnz.org.nz, 04 802 8218) or Cathy Martin (cathy@pgnz.org.nz, 04 802 8214).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'N. Rickman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nicole Rickman

General Manager – Membership and Professional Services