

Transforming Medication Safety in Northern Ireland - NEWS

Issue 2
Nov 2025

Transforming Medication Safety in Northern Ireland (TMSNI) Strategy was launched by the Health Minister in September 2020 in response to the World Health Organization's (WHO) third Global Patient Safety Challenge 'Medication without Harm'.

The goal of the third Global Patient Safety Challenge on Medication Safety is to gain worldwide commitment and action to reduce severe, avoidable medication-related harm, specifically by addressing harm resulting from errors or unsafe practices due to weaknesses in health systems.

New tool will support patient engagement



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The Programme Team comprises staff from the Strategic Planning and Partnership Group (SPPG), and Health and Social Care Quality Improvement (HSCQI) who have been specifically tasked with rolling out the TMSNI Implementation Plan.



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'5 Moments' tool will enhance patient safety and engagement

The recently launched Northern Ireland (NI) '5 Moments for Medication Safety' tool has been developed to enhance patient engagement and safety in medication management by focusing on five critical moments where actions can significantly improve medication safety.



The '5 Moments for Medication Safety' tool was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) as part of the Global

Patient Safety Challenge **Medication Without Harm** and has been adapted for use across NI through engagement and consultation with patients and carers.

The 5 Moments for Medication Safety are detailed below.

- 1 Starting** - ensuring the correct medication is initiated.
- 2 Taking** - properly taking the medication as prescribed.
- 3 Adding** - understanding the implications of adding new medications.
- 4 Reviewing** - regularly assessing the effectiveness and necessity of current medications.
- 5 Stopping** - safely discontinuing medications when appropriate.

The HSC '5 Moments for Medication Safety' tool will be launched across Northern Ireland in autumn 2025.

Healthcare staff will be able to refer patients and carers to the tool to promote conversations around their medicines and improve shared decision-making.



Safety matters with medication

Medicines are the most commonly used medical intervention in Northern Ireland, and at any one time 70% of our people take prescribed or over the counter medicines to treat or prevent ill health. This newsletter shares news and activities that have been taken to share that message across Northern Ireland.

Demystifying Human Factors

A two-part Human Factors (HF) in Healthcare learning event was hosted via webinar (March 25) and in-person workshop at Riddel Hall (April 25), featuring internationally renowned experts Prof. Paul Bowie and Dr. Helen Vosper. The event aimed to deepen understanding of HF and its application to improve medication safety across clinical settings. The sessions provided an overview of human factors with a focus on designing for people, human factors and quality improvement and safety culture.



Dr Helen Vosper



Prof Paul Bowie

Post-event evaluation demonstrated an 88% satisfaction rate among participants, with many indicating that the sessions provided valuable insights, practical resources, and renewed motivation to advance human factors principles within their respective organisations. Contact medicine.safety@hscni.net for further information, including slides.

Key takeaways

- HF is a distinct discipline essential for safer care.
- System design, team learning, and safety culture are central to effective HF integration.
- Tools like Systems Engineering Initiative for Patient Safety (SEIPS) and Safety Culture Cards (NHS Education for Scotland) empower teams to apply HF in daily practice.

Project Echo events advance TMSNI strategy commitments

A series of Project ECHO events was delivered between June 2024 and April 2025 in support of the Transforming Medication Safety in Northern Ireland (TMSNI) strategy. These sessions provided a structured platform for multidisciplinary engagement, knowledge exchange, and collaborative learning.

Each event was aligned with the strategic commitments of TMSNI, focusing on key areas such as supporting people to be more involved in decisions about their medication, encouraging reporting of concerns, reducing the risk of preventable harm involving high risk medicines such as opioids, look-alike sound-alike medicines and omissions or delays relating to supply chain issues and shortages.



The sessions featured presentations from individual subject matter experts as well as representatives from key organisations, including Parkinson's UK and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

Information on TMSNI ECHO network and 24/25 presentations can be found via this link - <https://view.pagetiger.com/dbrssdp/1>

Feedback

“
92% of participants said it built strong connections with other healthcare professionals on the importance of Medication Safety
”

“
96% of participants said it improved knowledge and confidence of staff working within the healthcare sector
”

“
96% of participants said it was very beneficial to share best practice and new ideas to improve patient care
”

Medication Safety Conference highlights collaboration benefit

Dublin Castle hosted the inaugural All-Island Medication Safety Conference, 29 November 2024. Over 250 delegates attended to enhance healthcare practices across the island.

Minister Mike Nesbitt and Prof. Cathy Harrison (Chief Pharmaceutical Officer NI) delivered addresses, alongside presentations from other distinguished healthcare professionals. Keynote speakers included

Prof. Bryony Dean Franklin and Dr. Nikhil Prakash Gupta, representing the World Health Organization (WHO). The conference was a joint initiative led by the Irish Medication Safety Network (IMSN) and TMSNI with support from the Department of Health NI, Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG), Medicines Optimisation Innovation Centre (MOIC), Public Health Agency (PHA) Research & Development and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

This landmark event brought together a diverse group of experts, researchers, policymakers and patient advocates, focusing on medication safety in both the Republic and Northern Ireland.

The conference showcased collaborative efforts to improve medication safety across borders. It contained key presentations, patient stories, and innovative projects, offering a comprehensive overview of current strategies and future goals.

It also provided the opportunity for poster presentation displays from over 100 projects to be exhibited aimed at amplifying the voices of patients, clinicians, and policymakers, which help reinforce a culture of safety and continuous improvement.

Victoria Stokes, Specialty Registrar in Chemical Pathology (BHSC), received a prize for her poster presentation on the management of acute hyperkalaemia, focusing on reducing potassium levels and mitigating the risk of hypoglycaemia.

Tara Hayden, Senior Pharmacy Technician at St. Luke's Hospital, was also recognised for her poster on medicines reconciliation training for pharmacy technicians. Bernie O'Reilly presented the All-Island Medication Awards on behalf of Margaret Murphy (External lead advisor for WHO).



(l-r) Kate O'Flaherty, Niamh O'Hanlon, Angela Carrington and Cathy Harrison.



Above: Victoria Stokes,
Speciality Registrar in
Chemical Pathology



Above: Tara Hayden, Senior
Pharmacy Technician, St
Luke's Hospital

Left: Health Minister Mike Nesbitt



Above: Prof. Cathy Harrison, Chief
Pharmaceutical Officer



Above right: Domenica Gilroy
Regional Senior Improvement
Advisor, HSCQI



Right: Fiona Kirkpatrick, Senior
Principal Pharmaceutical Officer



Planning for 2026 All-island Medication Safety Conference

Preparations are underway for the second All-Island Medication Safety Conference scheduled for November 2026 in Belfast. This will build on the success of the previous conference and consolidate learning and sharing of best practices North and South. Details will be made available in due course.

'We can all make medicines safer'

The annual #MedSafetyWeek unites the world in an effort to raise awareness about proper medicine use and reporting systems to safeguard patient health. Each year there is a different focus or theme to encourage the reporting of suspected side effects.

This year (Nov 3-9) will mark the 10th #MedSafetyWeek. This year's theme will be, 'We can all help make medicines safer'.

During #MedSafetyWeek TMSNI will help spread the 'We can all help make medicines safer' campaign by joining forces with medicines regulators and health authorities to share #MedSafetyWeek materials on HSC social media channels.

#MedSafetyWeek (Nov 3-9, 2025)

IF YOU ARE A
**HEALTHCARE
PROFESSIONAL,**
YOU CAN ASK...

1. What medicines are you currently taking?
2. Do you have any underlying conditions?
3. Do you have any allergies?
4. Are you taking any supplements or herbal/traditional medicines?
5. Do you know how to report side effects?



Spotlight turns towards Time Critical Medications

On 26 June 2025, the TMSNI team and the Health and Social Care Quality Improvement (HSCQI) Northern Ireland (HSCQI) team at the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) co-hosted a regional stakeholder engagement workshop at Riddel Hall.

The aim of the workshop was to identify the next priority topic for a future regional medication safety improvement programme.

Following a system-wide scoping exercise, two topics were shortlisted; Polypharmacy and Time-Critical Medications (omitted and delayed doses).

Having heard presentations from subject matter experts and engaged in breakout sessions to deliberate the two topics, it was agreed that Time Critical Medications was the topic to take forward as the next regional improvement programme.

Guest speakers included Prof. Michael Scott, Director MOIC, Erika Hughes, encompass Lead Pharmacist SEHSCT, Bronagh Ward, Pharmacy Advisor to TMSNI and a recorded video from Dr. Jonny Acheson, Director of Engagement at Parkinson's UK and ED Consultant, who shared his story of living with Parkinson's.

Over 90 delegates from across all part of the HSC system were in attendance.

Next steps are currently being agreed and more details to follow in the coming months.

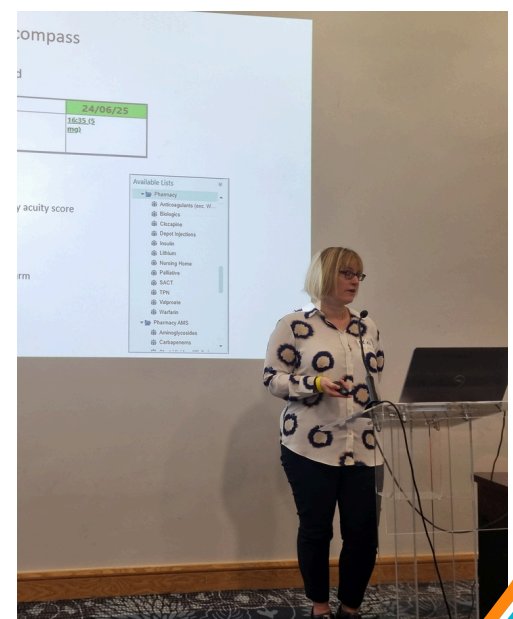


Prof. Mike Scott



Angela Carrington

Erika Hughes



Yellow Card Scheme

More people are reporting suspected safety concerns

Since its launch in September 2023, the Northern Ireland (NI) Yellow Card Centre (YCC) has actively promoted the Yellow Card scheme through training sessions, Trust roadshows and posters in GP practices and community pharmacies.

The Yellow Card scheme collects and monitors information on suspected safety concerns involving healthcare products, including suspected side effects to medicines and vaccines, and potential defective or falsified medicines.

The first annual report for 23-24 shows that more people are reporting suspected safety concerns with healthcare products. The report shows that 797 reports to the Yellow Card scheme were made from NI, an increase of 32% compared to 2022.

Yellow Card reports increased significantly across NI and other UK regions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Comparing current data with previous years is difficult due to pandemic related reporting and differences in reporting periods. In line with other UK YCC, pre-pandemic reporting trends have been used as a benchmark.

The YCC NI continue to identify and target low reporting groups alongside raising awareness of the Yellow Card scheme among healthcare professionals and the public.

The second annual report for 24-25 is anticipated around November 2025.

Every report counts.

Report suspected side effects, fake or defective medicines, or medical device incidents.

Anyone can report.

Report for yourself, or someone else to the Yellow Card scheme.

mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard

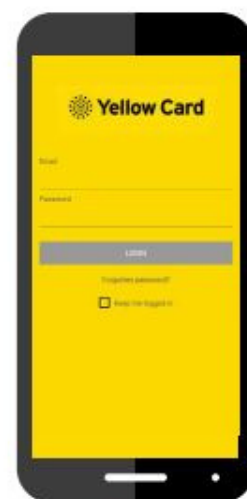
Report in a few simple steps.
Online, or via the app.



Visit our website

Download the app

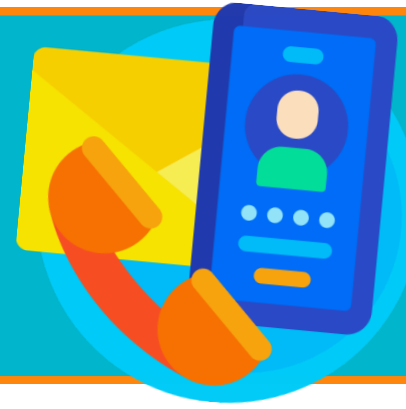
 Yellow Card



Aine Liggett, Lead Pharmacist, Yellow Card Centre

How to get in contact

If you would like to find out more about the work of Transforming Medication Safety in Northern Ireland or if you would like to contribute to the next edition of the newsletter please email: medicine.safety@hscni.net or <https://forms.office.com/e/zWMyXxUkWO>



Opioid programme successfully lays foundations for improvement

The Opioid Improvement Collaborative Programme (OICP) was launched to address the risks associated with opioid prescribing for non-malignant pain across Northern Ireland.

Led by HSCQI and aligned with the TMSNI strategy and WHO's "Medication Without Harm" initiative, the programme aimed to reduce avoidable harm from high-risk medicines through targeted quality improvement (QI) projects. Nine multidisciplinary project teams from primary and secondary care settings participated, fostered collaboration, built QI capacity, and created new networks across healthcare sectors.

Thirty participants attained Level 2 QI certification.

An evaluation report conducted by MOIC recommended scaling successful interventions regionally, maintaining QI networks, and enhancing support for future programmes.



Overall, the OICP has laid a foundation for long-term improvements in opioid safety, with potential to inform public health campaigns and policy development across NI.

Details of the nine projects, change ideas, QI methodology used and contact details can be found in the [programme booklet](#).