



ANNUAL REPORT
2024



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Professor Frank Murray - Chairman Practitioner Health

Dear Colleagues,

As Chairman of the Board of Practitioner Health, I am pleased to present our 2024 Annual Report. The enthusiastic commitment of Practitioner Health continues with an increase in numbers of practitioners presenting to the service again this year.

The importance of having a confidential, independent programme is evident and we are pleased to be able to offer such a service to our colleagues. We recognise that seeking help can be difficult for a practitioner, with many barriers preventing easy access to support. Our aim is to be accessible in a timely manner when someone contacts the programme, recognising that practitioners often present late and sometimes in crisis.

Practitioner Health is a registered charity and is fully compliant with the Charity Regulator requirements and with audited annual accounts. We are indebted to all our donors who continue to provide crucial financial support to the programme. This enables us to sustain the programme in its current format.

I would like to acknowledge and express my thanks to the outstanding commitment and skills of the Practitioner Health team delivering the service, so ably led by Dr Íde Delargy in her role as Medical Director.



Professor Frank Murray MD
Chairman, Practitioner Health



MEDICAL DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Dr Íde Delargy - Medical Director Practitioner Health

Practitioner Health had another busy year in 2024. The number of presentations has increased once more and the service is becoming better known. We are mindful of how difficult it can be for practitioners to admit both to themselves and to others that they are struggling. They can find it difficult to be in the patient role. There is the fear for their reputation as well as fear for career progress. This may lead to self-management and sometimes self-treatment which is far from ideal. Having independent medical advice is an important part of self-care, and an independent service such as Practitioner Health can help to reassure someone who needs help.

Our service is designed to support those who are struggling and to encourage them to seek independent, confidential help. We provide non-judgemental and compassionate care. We can support someone who is finding it difficult to navigate workplace issues and help them to cope while doing that. Our advice is independent, practical and achievable which practitioners really appreciate.

The issues we see range from relatively minor ones which can resolve quickly, to some major mental illnesses. As we develop our knowledge and experience about the problems practitioners face on a day-to-day basis, we are increasingly aware that it is never one singular issue that causes someone to seek help. More frequently, a number of factors converge to cause distress. This can range from an adverse event at work, conflict in the workplace, a patient complaint or issues in their personal life. As would be expected, everyone has a tipping point. We know that practitioners tend to be very resilient people who often sacrifice their own health and wellbeing in order to serve their patients. We also know that when someone is feeling vulnerable for whatever reason, their resilience is compromised. We are privileged to have two consultant psychiatrists on our team which means we can provide timely access to appropriate mental health assessments, treatment and management. Where a practitioner may have a chronic and enduring mental health issue, we will support them and sometimes bridge their treatment pending onward referral to a more comprehensive mental health team.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues Dr Kieran O'Driscoll and Dr Matt Lynch who have been part of our clinical team in 2024. Our colleague Dr Justin Brophy retired in 2024 and I must thank him for his enormous contribution to the service. Our clinical advisory team meets quarterly and provides further opinions and advice on problem cases and I would also like to acknowledge the time and effort of everyone involved.

I must give a special mention to our excellent Board of Trustees who steer the Practitioner Health programme with passion and prudence. I am indebted to their ongoing work and without the commitment, expertise and the support of this dedicated Board, the programme would not be as successful as it is.

Dr Íde Delargy
Medical Director, PHMP

MISSION STATEMENT

Practitioner health (PH) aims to provide support and psychological care for doctors, dentists and pharmacists who may have a mental health issue or who may have developed a substance use issue. We aim to support practitioners to recover and to help them remain at work or return to work healthy and well.

We continue to raise awareness of the service and the resources we provide. Our aim is that every doctor, dentist, and pharmacist should know that the service exists and the pathways to accessing help. Most practitioners will never need our service, but they may be in a position to direct a colleague to seek help should the need arise.

ANALYSIS OF PRESENTATIONS TO PRACTITIONER HEALTH IN 2024

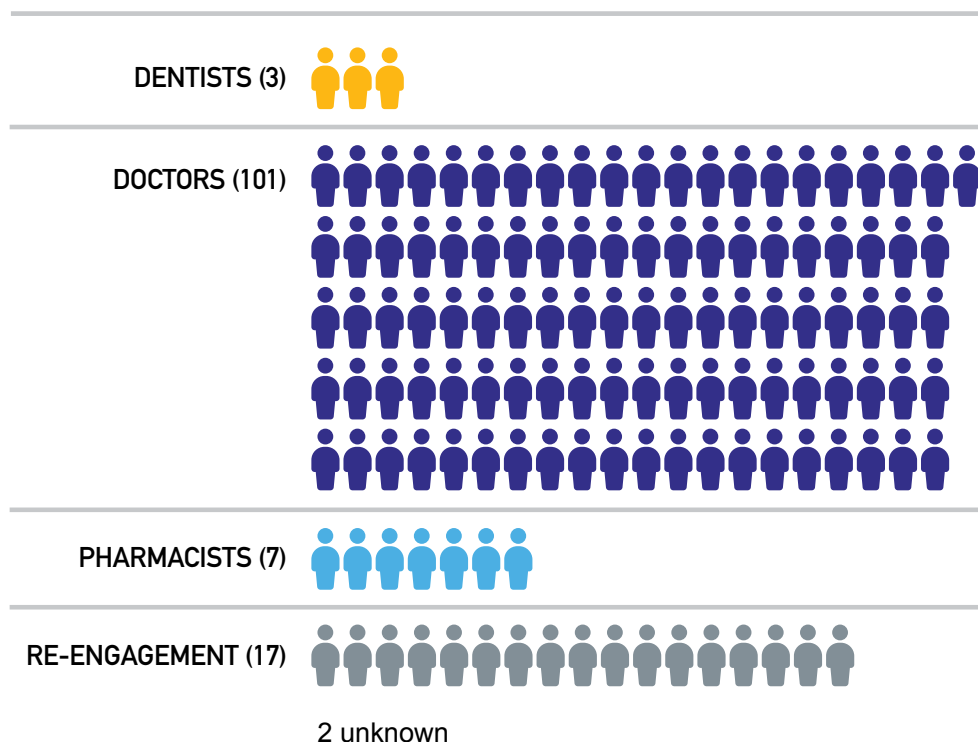
There were 113 new presentations to PH in 2024. In addition, 17 practitioners who had previously attended the programme contacted us again and re-engaged. At presentation, each person is assessed by one of the doctors on the PH team and a care plan is agreed with them. A range of treatment options are offered, including psychological supports, medication management, inpatient treatment or onward referral as appropriate to the individual's needs. The programme continues to expand its network of therapists around the country. These therapists are familiar with the nuances and complexities of working with practitioners. Where necessary, PH can offer therapy sessions free of charge depending on the financial needs of the patient.

It is noteworthy that practitioners attending the programme have very good outcomes.

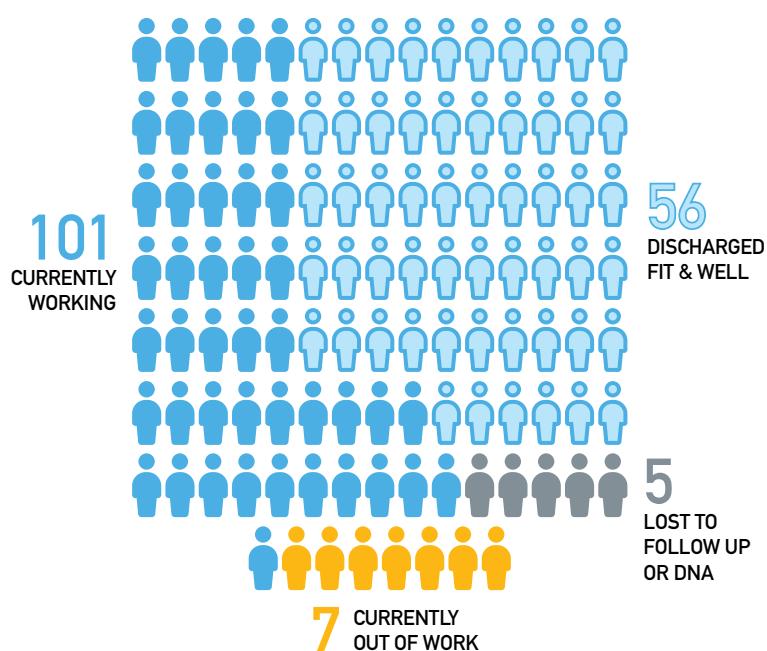
- Of the 113 new patients seen in 2024, 101 of the practitioners are currently working.
- 56 have been discharged from the Programme fit and well.
- 27 practitioners who needed to take time off work are now back to work healthy and well.
- 7 of the new patients are currently out of work.
- 5 practitioners were either lost to follow up or DNA.

Most of the new presentations in 2024 were from doctors. This reflects the increasing awareness of the service amongst the medical profession as well as signposting from the training bodies, occupational health, GPs and the Irish Medical Council.

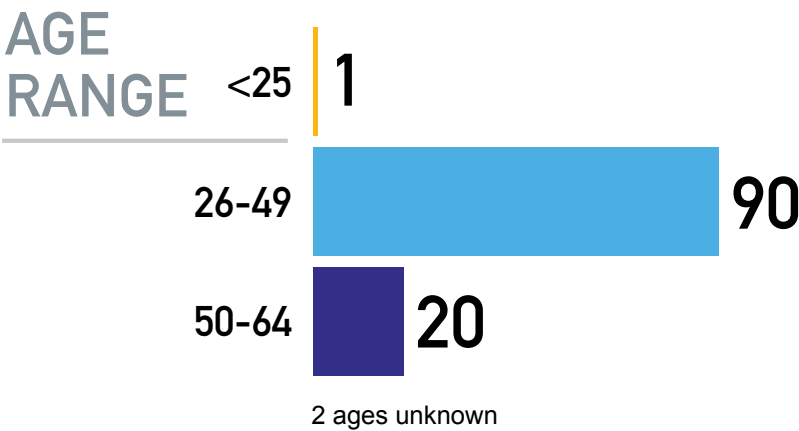
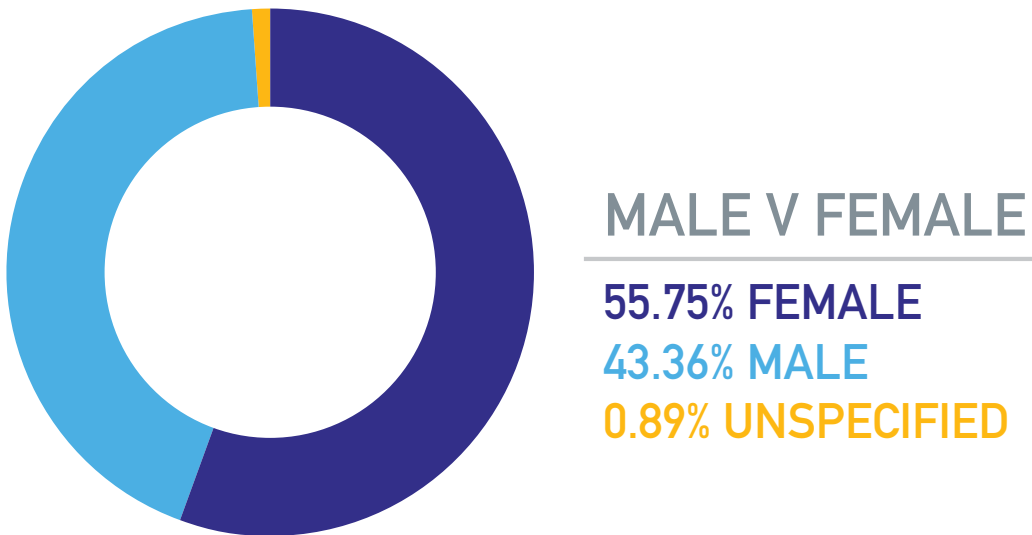
PRESENTATIONS BY OCCUPATION 2024 PRESENTATIONS



113 NEW PRESENTATIONS IN 2024



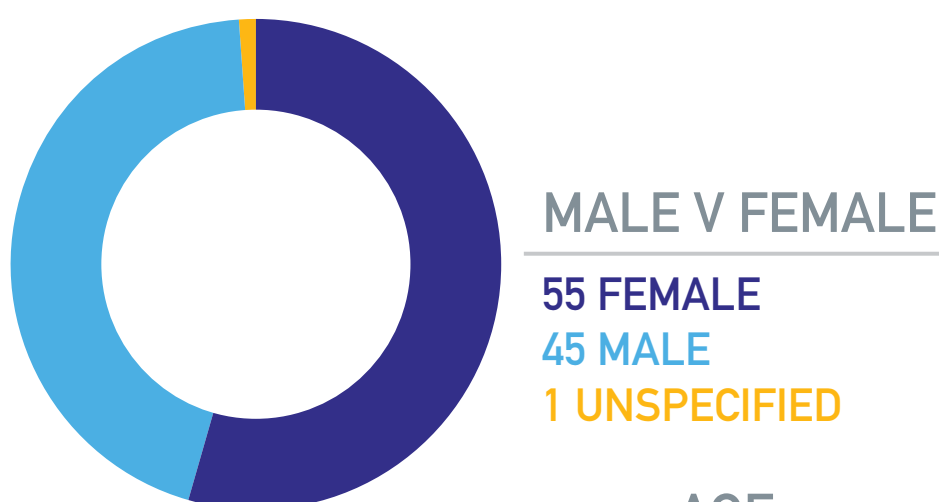
As has been the case in previous years, there were more females presenting than males and the age profile reflects an younger age cohort



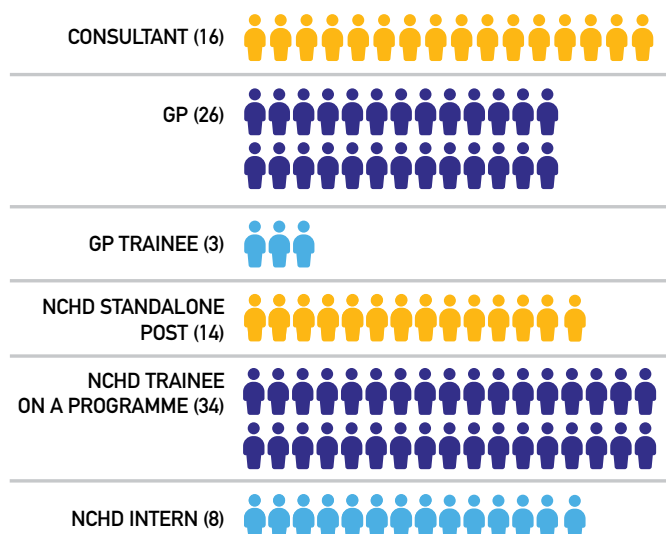
NEW DOCTOR REFERRALS

As in previous years, 81 doctors were in the younger age category (26-49 years) and this cohort seems to particularly benefit from our support and guidance at this phase of their careers. While we acknowledge that supports are provided by the various training schemes, the intern support programme as well as Occupational Health and the Employee Assistance Programme, particularly to the younger cohort of doctors, some doctors prefer the option of availing of support from our confidential programme.

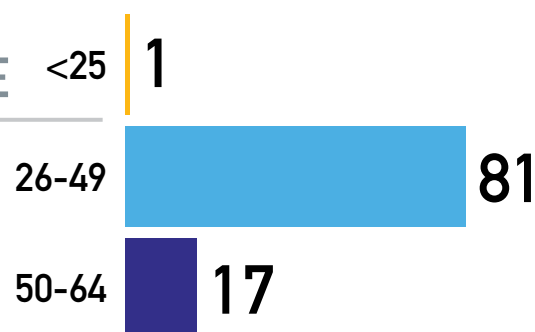
In 2024 there were 17 more senior doctors presented to the programme, both consultants and general practitioners. We believe affording a discrete and confidential service for more senior clinicians is essential as this cohort can often find it difficult to seek help and to find a safe place to disclose whatever is troubling them. 8 of the new doctors are attending the Health Committee of the Medical Council and are reviewed regularly by the team in PH.



STAGE IN CAREER

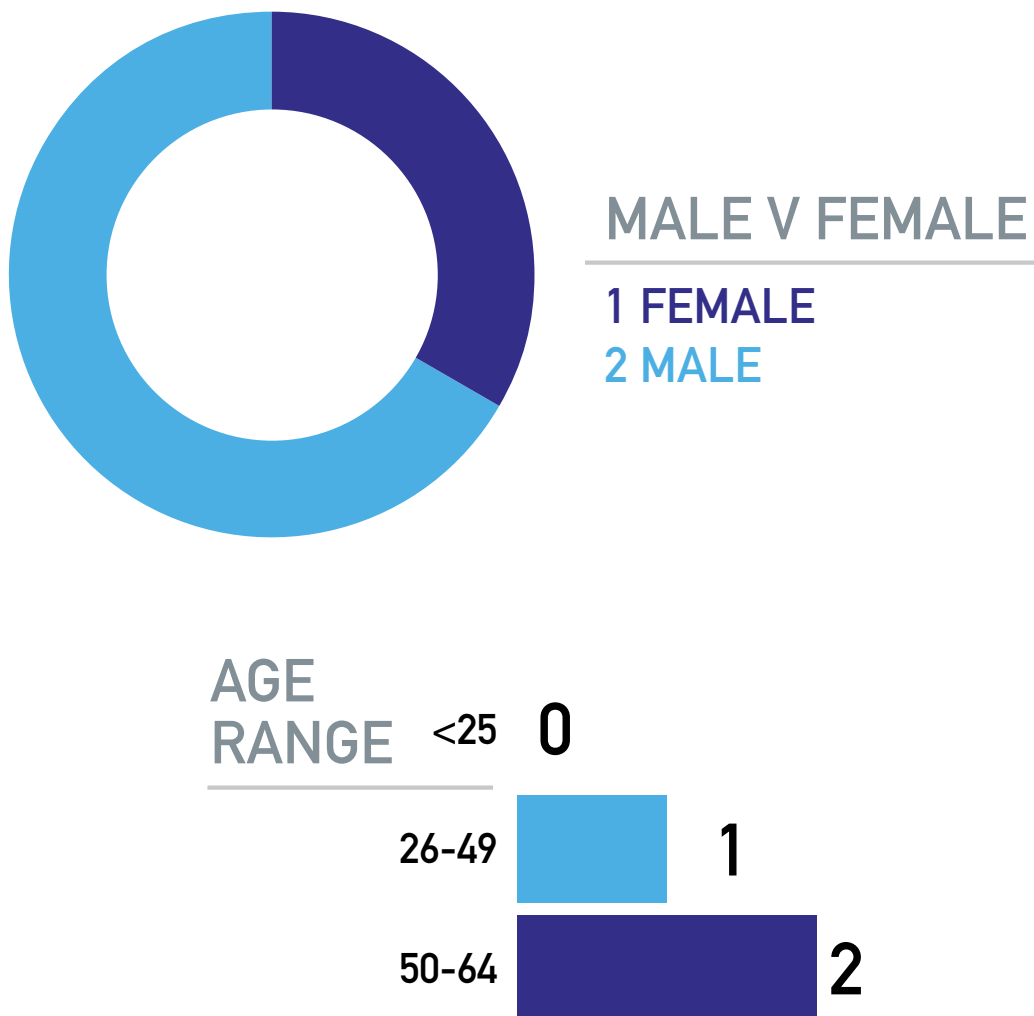


AGE RANGE



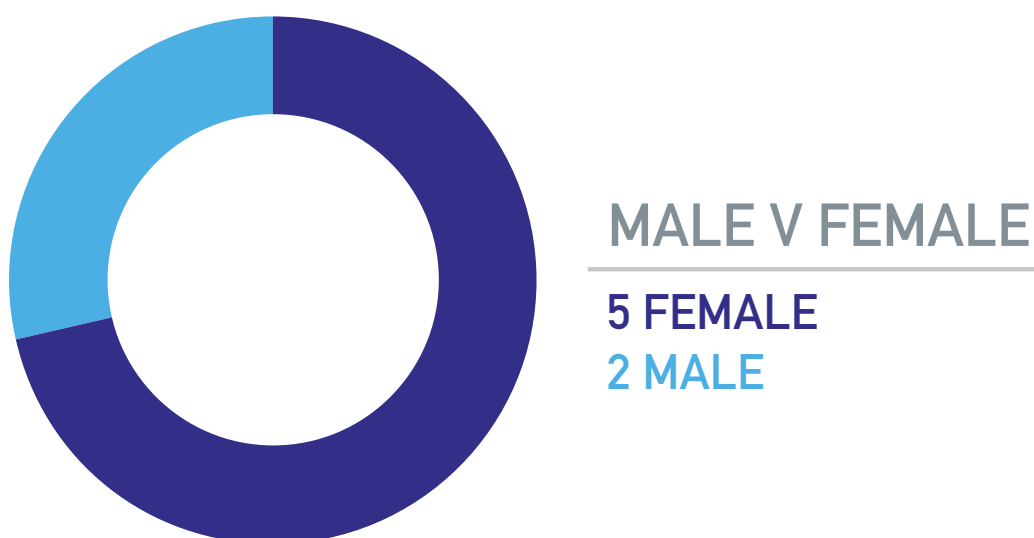
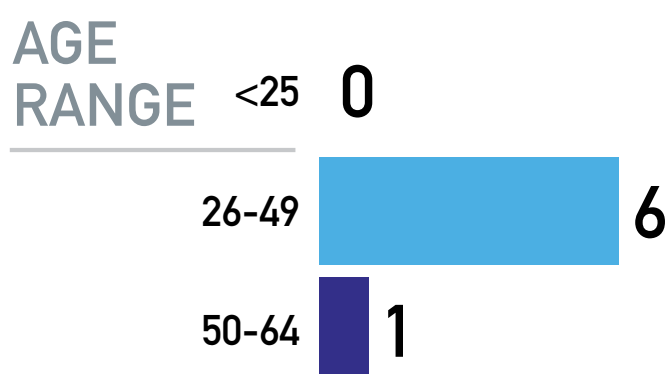
NEW DENTIST REFERRALS 2024

The number of dentists presenting remains very low as has been the case in previous years. Although the reports in the literature would suggest higher levels of stress and mental health issues amongst dentists when compared to the general public this does not appear to manifest in dentists seeking help with these issues. This is something that would warrant further investigation to understand what the barriers to seeking help might be. We acknowledge the regular communication from the various dental bodies about the programme and encourage ongoing messaging through social media and all other channels.



NEW PHARMACIST REFERRALS 2024

Pharmacist presentations in 2024 remain low at 7 new presentations. We are working with the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland in order to improve communication and raise awareness about the programme. Our message is to encourage pharmacists to present early and not to wait until an issue is referred to the regulator. There remains significant work to be done on this.



OBSERVATIONS OF THE PRACTITIONER HEALTH TEAM

Dr Kieran O'Driscoll - Consultant Neuropsychiatrist with PH

It is our impression that patients who attend the PH Programme take comfort in finding a confidential, nonjudgmental, sympathetic and interested reception and that their plight is something we deal with on a regular basis so that we have accrued a level of expertise to back up the advice given. In a way the clinical presentations could be dealt with in any psychiatric / psychological setting but there is an added benefit of attending PH because of the advice on how to manage the political and or social effects on their career or lifestyle. We both support and guide the patients who at the time of referral are frequently in crisis either with the governing bodies and / or their employers and unable to see a way out which is comforting to patients to know that we will stay with them until their crisis resolves.

Dr Matt Lynch - GP with PH

THE VALUE OF PH

The stresses on Doctors and Pharmacists have increased significantly due to factors outside their control. Every single one is vulnerable to the effects of stress if enough circumstances conspire. When this happens, they need to know that there is a service of fellow professionals, who are able to understand their situation and provide confidential, empathic, unrushed, and thoughtful help as well as direction and follow up.

I believe that when this is done in a supportive way with only their interests at heart, most will be able to recover and return to work.

Without such a service, there is a very real danger that the person suffering becomes more and more isolated and unable to see a way out of their plight. If that happens it poses a great danger for the person themselves, their patients, their family and wider society.

MY EXPERIENCE WORKING IN PH

I have been fortunate to work in PH since 2023. Prior to this, I worked as a GP for 30 years. The majority of people that I am able to help are experiencing significant, persisting and debilitating stress without major psychiatric illness. Clearly if there is evidence of the latter, they require the expertise of my consultant colleagues. Active listening and explaining how their life has (usually temporarily) been so badly affected by a combination of factors is crucial to people realizing they are not alone and that it is not their fault. Once this happens and an outline of a pathway to recovery is agreed, hope returns and one is able to see improvement and recovery in the majority of cases.

As a fellow front-line, clinical professional I am extremely aware that “there but for the grace of God, go I “. We are all vulnerable to the stresses associated with providing health care, and it is extremely satisfying if one can play a role in helping a colleague back to a better life.

The team approach and supportive collegiate atmosphere in PHMP has been an enormously positive aspect of working here. There is a lot of wisdom around our table!

TESTIMONIALS

"I am writing to you to thank you from the bottom of my heart as I find myself getting healed in stages.

Every time I visit you, I get closer to accepting my past , understand my triggers and the impact these triggers have on me.

This year I will do everything I can to move on and heal. Please, do keep supporting me and providing me the necessary tools. The best step I have ever taken was to contact your practice."

"A consultant for over 20 years, running at full pelt on the hamster wheel was all I knew. Smiling and nodding in the workplace, but increasingly grumpy and monosyllabic at home. Then a run of infections, self treated, that I could not shake. Ultimately systemic sepsis and hospitalisation called a halt to my "physician, heal thyself," act.

A pause. Some reflection. Some helpful family intervention. How had I got here. Burnout? Breakdown? Something else?

For answers to these questions I sought professional help. This led me to Practitioner Health. The initial consultation was remarkable. How therapeutic to tell my sorry saga to another soul. How transformative to be listened to with patience and kindness. How remarkable to have sense made of my long journey to HDU. Family trauma leading to PTSD, living my life in fight or flight mode. Rendering me vulnerable to the stresses of the workplace. High BP, high resting heart rate, high cortisol, the latter resulting in immune deficiencies with inevitable consequences. Practitioner health gave me practical advice and support to start my journey back to life and happiness both at home and in the workplace. That journey continues today. I know that support, should I need it, is just a phone call away. I cannot recommend the service highly enough."

SAMPLE PATIENTS

Please note that these cases are indicative of the type of case we see in PH.

A GP trainee presented as he had struggled with his mental health since medical school. Throughout his early training he tended to become overwhelmed and the training scheme had accommodated this by giving him additional time to complete tasks. On presentation he was anxious with an exaggerated fear of being reported to the Medical Council. He was imagining his name in the newspapers and social media and was concerned about the impact this could have for his family. Following assessment, he was diagnosed with depression and anxiety which was then medicated. There were unresolved issues from childhood which included parental separation which had never been discussed. He was referred for CBT to help him cope better and to help him overcome her fears. He was medicated for 6 months at which time he was able to reduce her antidepressant. He continues to engage with the programme and is currently doing well.

A pharmacist was referred to PH by her employer. Tablets were found to be missing in the pharmacy and when confronted she admitted to having taken a few diazepam to help her sleep and to help with stress. Her employer requested she seek help and agreed that they would be happy to have her back to work once safe to do so.

At initial assessment it emerged that the pharmacist had a problem with taking benzodiazepines and OTC codeine for a number of years. She had a number of underlying stressors including being a single Mum with small children, isolated from family and friends and trying to work as well. At assessment she was diagnosed with a substance use disorder driven by an underlying depression. She was medicated for her depression and was put on a random schedule for drug screening. She has co-operated fully with this plan and has remained abstinent from all substances. She is receiving supportive therapy and is doing well. Her employer was satisfied with the outcome of the drug screening as well as the benefit to her mood. She is now back at work.

Dentist self-referred to PH. She was aware of the service through the bulletins published by the Irish Dental Association but never thought she would need the service herself. She was anxious about her work and worried that she would make a mistake. She feared being complained to the Dental Council. Her sleep was disrupted, she lost a significant amount of weight, and she was persistently ruminative about making a mistake. Her GP had commenced her on medication some months previously but this was not making an impact. On further assessment it emerged that this lady was being subjected to bullying and undermining behaviour by one of her colleagues in the workplace. This was a trigger for her low mood and her lack of confidence. Anxiety had always been a feature for her but this had escalated in response to her workplace issues. There were issues of concern in her personal life also which contributed to how she was feeling. PH provided reassurance and support as well as helping her to manage her anxiety better. Initially, short term medication was required and this practitioner has become more assured in her own skills and competency. She continues to attend and her anxiety has much improved.

A consultant presented as he had been drinking on a daily basis and recognised he was finding it difficult to stop. His job was highly stressful from the workload point of view and there were also multiple conflicts within the team. He was struggling with the workplace environment and this was certainly one of the triggers for his drinking.

A recovery plan was put in place which included committing to abstinence, attending counselling and being regularly monitored. He was also offered medication as an adjunctive support in his initial recovery.

At initial presentation, he believed his drinking had no impact on his work as he felt he did not go in to work hungover. Over time however, he realised that his drinking influenced his mood, his decision making and his emotional responses when challenged by patients or staff. It was only when he became sober that he could appreciate the stability of his moods and the clarity in his thinking. He continues with the programme and is doing well 1 year into abstinence.

A pharmacist presented to PH complaining of severe anxiety and panic attacks. This was affecting her ability to look after her 2 small children and was also interfering in her concentration at work. While she had long standing issues with anxiety particularly around exam time, this had become much more acute in recent times. In addition to working in an extremely busy pharmacy, her father was diagnosed with terminal cancer and she felt the need to care for him. He was living in a remote area of the country. Her youngest child was only 6 months old and she had suffered post-natal depression with her first child and she felt this was happening for her again. This combination of factors resulted in severe sleep disturbance which left her exhausted, depressed and more anxious. She tried to self-manage the situation by using alcohol to dampen her anxiety and this became a problem. Her employer recognised that she was struggling and suggested she seek help through PH. Following assessment by the psychiatrist on the PH team, she was medicated appropriately, supported with therapy and agreed to ongoing monitoring of her alcohol issue. She also worked on alternative methods of managing her anxiety such as meditation and breathing exercises. She took time off work to recover and engaged well with the programme. She remains with the programme but is back working and doing well.



THE BOARD OF PRACTITIONER HEALTH WISH TO THANK ALL OUR SUPPORTERS WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE RUNNING OF THE SERVICE IN MANY WAYS AND IN PARTICULAR OUR FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS.

OUR FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS INCLUDE:

CHALLENGE INSURANCE	IRISH MEDICAL COUNCIL
CLANWILLIAM HEALTH	IRISH MEDICAL ORGANISATION
COLLEGE OF ANAESTHESIOLOGY IRELAND	IRISH COLLEGE OF OPHTHALMOLOGISTS
COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRY	IRISH PHARMACY UNION
DENTAL COUNCIL	MEDICAL PROTECTION SOCIETY AND DENTAL PROTECTION
DENTAL BENEVOLENT FUND	MEDISEC
DENTAL HOSPITAL	SHEPPARD TRUST
HSE/NDTP	ROYAL COLLEGE PHYSICIANS OF IRELAND
IRISH COLLEGE OF GENERAL PRACTITIONERS	ROYAL COLLEGE SURGEONS IN IRELAND
IRISH DENTAL ASSOCIATION	ROYAL MEDICAL BENEVOLENT FUND
IRISH HOSPITAL CONSULTANTS ASSOCIATION	

We also received individual donations from practitioners for which we are very grateful.

The Board acknowledges the work of the Medical Director Dr Íde Delargy and our administrator Ms Sarah Keegan with assistance from Ms Katherine Madden all of whom have played a vital role in supporting the service. We also acknowledge the support and dedication of the Clinical Advisory Group who all give generously of their time and expertise.

PROF FRANK MURRAY CHAIRMAN	DR BARNEY MURPHY TRUSTEE
MS SIOBHAN KELLY HONORARY SECRETARY	MR ANTHONY OWENS TRUSTEE
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PROF FREDDIE WOOD TRUSTEE	EAMON CROKE TRUSTEE

Dr Barney Murphy, Prof Freddie Woods, Mr Anthony Owens and Mr Julian Smith retired from the Board in 2024.

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Name	Practitioner Health
Registered Address	41 Main Street Blackrock Co Dublin
Registration Numbers	
Company Registration Number	529820
Registered Charity Number	20200787
Revenue Charity Number	21035
Auditors	DHKN Limited Galway Financial Services Centre Moneenageisha Road Galway
Bankers	Allied Irish Banks PLC Blackrock Co. Dublin
Solicitors	O'Connor Solicitors 8 Clare Street Dublin 2
Contact Details	Practitioner Health Matters 41 Main Street Blackrock Co Dublin 085 760 1274 confidential@practitionerhealth.ie www.practitionerhealth.ie

PractitionerHealth
LOOKING AFTER YOUR WELLBEING IN CONFIDENCE

Support in Confidence

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