

# Awareness Campaign on Medicines And Driving Launched at Pharmacy Summit

## EMBARGOED UNTIL 2PM

**Tuesday, November 4, 2008:** The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland, (PSI), the statutory regulator for pharmacists and pharmacies, and the Road Safety Authority (RSA), today launched a public awareness campaign on medicines and driving at the PSI's annual National Pharmacy Summit in Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin.

The Minister for Health & Children, Mary Harney TD addressed the summit, which featured the publication of a leaflet, '*Medicines and Driving*', created to ensure drivers are better informed on the dangers in this area.

Speaking at the event, PSI President Dr. Bernard Leddy highlighted that pharmacists have a critical role to play on this issue. "It is an offence to drive while under the influence of medicines, drugs or alcohol. Pharmacists are the healthcare professional at the point of supply of medicines, in effect the last qualified input before a person takes a prescribed or a non-prescription medicine."

"Certain medicines, both prescribed or non-prescription medicines from your pharmacy, may impair your ability to drive safely. We believe that pharmacists can make a significant contribution towards highlighting this and informing patients of the risks involved. We would actively encourage the public to always use their pharmacist as a resource to advise them on medicine intake, but even more so with regard to the use of medicines while driving. Road safety is the responsibility of everyone in society both in Ireland and across Europe and that is also why the PSI has signed up to the European Road Safety Charter."

Speaking at the launch of the new leaflet, Mr. Noel Brett, Chief Executive, RSA, said: "Many people are unaware that some prescription and non-prescription medicines can affect driving ability. As such the RSA is delighted to team up with the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland in order to get the message across that when you start taking a new medicine, where prescribed by a doctor, or bought over the counter, you should check with your GP or pharmacist to see if it is safe to drive while using that medicine. If it is not, discuss what alternatives are available."

The new leaflet highlights the medicines that may reduce the ability to drive safely and advises that people always check with their pharmacist or doctor if their medicines could affect their driving. This includes medicines prescribed by a doctor or non-prescription medicines recommended by a pharmacist or herbal medicines. The leaflet also points out that these effects can be increased if the medicine is combined with alcohol or other drugs or medicines. The campaign will also focus on educating health-care professionals on their responsibilities and it is also planned that a sticker will be created to be used by pharmacists on packaging to flag medicines that reduce the ability to drive safely.

Today's Summit heard from European expert on drugs and driving, Dr Han de Gier who spoke about the need for greater public awareness of this issue and outlined a major EU project on the impact of drugs on road safety.

The Summit also heard from Dr Catherine Duggan, University of London, on medication errors and how pharmacists can improve risk management in this area, including better communication between healthcare professionals about patients' medications. Another key patient safety issue was addressed by Dr Almath Spooner of the Irish Medicines Board, who spoke about pharmacovigilance (the monitoring of medicines on the market for potentially harmful side-effects) and said that 'real life use' of medicines often shows up side-effects that may not have been obvious before a drug comes to market.

Joy Wingfield, professor of pharmacy law and ethics at Nottingham University, spoke about the ethical principles that govern the profession. The PSI has drawn up a new Code of Conduct for pharmacists and the key principle of this Code is that "the practice by a pharmacist of his/her profession must be directed to maintaining and improving the health, wellbeing, care and safety of the patient".

PSI President Dr Bernard Leddy said: "The new Code presents a challenge and an opportunity for the pharmacy profession. It will instigate a culture change and ensure that patient safety is at the core of how the profession is practised."

The PSI also presented its new coat of arms to the Minister in a ceremony to close the event.

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**Note to Editors:**

The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland, the Pharmacy Regulator, is the statutory body for pharmacists and pharmacies in Ireland. It acts in the public interest to regulate the profession.