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1. Reduction in fees

The largest health insurance company in Ireland is planning to cut the fees it pays to consultants by an average of 10% following on from a 5% reduction in fees paid last year. This is a considerable reduction in income.

In our last national report, we outlined the Government's imposed 8% reduction in all professional fees paid by the state and the particular impact that this had on GPs. GPs are bracing for further cuts that were announced in December, which is expected to be another 8% reduction.

2. Workforce

Ireland is predicting a severe shortage in doctors taking up advertised training places, placing increased pressure on an already over-burdened system. However there has been an increase in GP places available this year, increasing by 30%, from 120 places offered last year, to 157 places this year.

3. Competition Authority Study of the Medical Profession

Late last year, the Competition Authority partly published their report on GPs which identified solutions in terms of the GP workforce and the advertising of fees by GPs.

Training: Currently some GP trainees do not get their previous hospital training and experience recognised, therefore repeating some training. The Competition Authority recommended that doctors who have completed relevant training gaining necessary hospital experience (in conjunction with a short orientation course), should proceed immediately to the two years training in general practice.

Advertising: Previously, GPs were not permitted to advertise their services or prices. The Competition Authority recommended to the Medical Council that these restrictions should be lifted, and in November 2009 the restrictions on advertising were lifted.

4. Unclear representation of doctors in free practice

As reported at the last meeting in Madrid, the IMO was having difficulty with the Government's interpretation of Competition Law in Ireland which impeded negotiations and representation. We are hoping to see this legislation amended soon.