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## **Five main problems that complicate exercising free medical practice in Ireland.**

### **1. Reduction in fees**

The Government imposed an 8% reduction in all professional fees paid by the state. This had a particular impact on GPS. Generally it is reported that people are reducing their spending on health particularly in the area of private health insurance and doctor visits. The non-payment of wage agreements has also affected all doctors.

### **2. The implementation of the consultant contract**

The implementation of the new Consultant contract has made it increasingly difficult for doctors who split their time between the public and private system. This lack of clarity has concerned many consultants and has made a picture of their interaction between the public and private systems difficult to ascertain.

### **3. Shortage of Physicians**

The shortage of physicians in the country has made it more difficult to practice in Ireland, with demand for health services increasing so does the individual workload of the physician, making the working environment more difficult. The lack of training places in Ireland has meant that there are less doctors graduating in Ireland, both in free practice and contracted to the public service. With an ageing workforce also contributing to this problem, the shortage of physicians will become more pronounced over time.

### **4. Patients abandoning private health insurance**

While we are unsure how or if this will dramatically affect doctors in free practice, there have been reports recently in Ireland of people dropping out of private insurance schemes due to the economic crisis, which means further pressure on the public system and less people seeking the services of private physicians. While we are yet to see what effect this will have on doctors in free practice in Ireland, we will continue to monitor the situation.

### **5. Unclear representation of doctors in free practice**

The Governments interpretation of Competition Law in Ireland has made it difficult for the IMO to engage with Government in regards to negotiations and representation. While we hope that this will change soon, it is still complicating our ability to discuss important issues for some doctors in Ireland.