

Building a culture of Mentoring in Pharmacy

IOP launches a Mentoring Programme for pharmacists, by pharmacists

In October of this year, the Irish Institute of Pharmacy (IOP) launched its first Mentoring Programme for pharmacists. This evidence based, formal yet flexible programme is bespoke to pharmacists working in all practice areas and is the first of its kind offered to pharmacists in Ireland. Applications were invited from pharmacists from all sectors and all career stages, and the response exceeded places available. Another programme will be launched in May 2022.

Here, Sarah Chambers, Mentoring Programme Manager for the IOP gives an overview of the mentoring programme to date. We talk about Mentoring in Pharmacy - the opportunities and challenges, the practicalities involved and we also hear the perspectives of some of the many pharmacists involved in building a mentoring culture in pharmacy.

So, Sarah, what exactly is mentoring?

Mentoring is an important component of CPD and personal growth. It supports the development of a profession through supportive, nurturing relationships. A mentor acts as a sounding board and shares skills, knowledge and expertise whereas a mentee is supported through a transition in learning and is encouraged to develop their full potential. The relationship or partnership may cover a variety of contexts and when successful, it benefits the mentor, the mentee, the profession and patients.

Why does it matter in pharmacy, right now?

Pharmacists are uniquely placed to mentor one another. As a profession, we understand the challenges we face and the opportunities that exist and so are uniquely placed to be that sounding board, to ask those powerful questions or give some empowering advice to support and embed professional learning and growth.

Mentoring is one way to **harness the knowledge within the profession** such as understanding patient needs and experience, navigating the business and regulatory environment and the skills and experience of pharmacists and their teams. It is a way to **help others** by sharing access to this knowledge. It can work to reduce silos and barriers to entry across the profession and help participating pharmacists to **broaden perspectives and networks**.

Pharmacists flourish when they have the opportunity to **connect**

with each other - be it through training days or webinars. Pharmacy can be a solitary profession and Covid-19 has heightened this sense of isolation. Mentoring can address the sense of professional isolation many pharmacists feel and support people to remain professionally optimistic. The opportunity is here to be a profession that prioritises supporting and nurturing relationships as part of our professional identity. That feeling "it's not just me" or that sense of "giving back" and sharing your expertise is so important

Mentoring is a building block to becoming understood as a

profession, using our experience and unique position within the healthcare setting to develop the skills to build, influence and maximise performance. The IOP mentoring programme is working to build the belief in and understanding of mentoring across the profession and to drive a culture of self-leadership and leading others.

What are the challenges or potential barriers to developing this mentoring culture in pharmacy?

Mentoring is widely recognised as critical to the development of healthcare professionals yet it is not without its challenges:



Having a formal structure for mentoring within our profession will

1. Build our professional identity,
2. Expand our collective experiences
3. Build an effective support network of mentors for every stage of our career.


Emily Kelly
Mentoring Pilot Steering Committee Member



Before mentoring I was unsure how I could use my experience to help others.

Now I feel more confident in my own skills and happy I have given back to a profession that has been good to me


Margaret Doherty
Supervising & Superintendent Pharmacist
Raphoe Pharmacy, Co Donegal



Mentoring has been one of the most rewarding things I have done.

Try it. you will surprise yourself.


Margaret Doherty
Supervising & Superintendent Pharmacist
Raphoe Pharmacy, Co Donegal

1. Mentoring must be led by the profession. Adopting a mentoring culture is something that has to be driven from the ground up, right across the profession because people see and feel the value of it for them and their teams. Developing a mentoring culture in pharmacy will take focus, learning and role models across the profession. The IOP mentoring programme was launched as a result of pharmacists who attended the initial Mentoring Skills Training back in 2019. These pharmacists recognised the value of adopting mentoring skills for their own development and that of their teams and the profession as a whole and wanted to know how they could work together to make mentoring more accessible for pharmacists. This proactivity is vital - taking responsibility for how and what happens in the profession.

2. Mentoring takes time and effort and the benefits are not guaranteed. A successful mentoring relationship takes effort and commitment. Mentoring is a volunteer role and often happens outside of your working hours. The effort you invest in building trust during the initial stages sets the scene for the relationship that follows so this time is not something you can rush through and tick off.

How could this work in practice?

Earlier this year, 32 Pharmacists across Ireland recently completed a three month virtual Pilot Mentoring Programme, so we have seen that this can work in

practice. The focus of the pilot was on supporting newly qualified pharmacists with their CPD and ongoing reflective practice as well as testing the validity of our evidence based framework. The programme was flexible by nature with orientation training and ongoing support provided by the programme team. Matching of the mentors and mentees was completed by the programme team based on mentee preferences, mentor experience, personality descriptors and diversity. The mentoring pairs reflected the breadth of the profession with both inter and intra practice area matching.

On average, during the Mentoring Pilot, mentoring pairs met for 60 minutes virtually every 3-4 weeks, outside of work, with time spent

for preparation and reflection in addition to this. This was during the pandemic, where pharmacists were already incredibly busy so it was humbling to see pharmacists giving their time to the mentoring relationship. Pharmacists who were involved fed back that mentoring actually gave them energy and that they looked forward to the sessions in their week.

Outcomes

Pharmacists who took part in the pilot completed surveys prior to mentoring and at the end of the programme to see whether the pilot programme was impactful.

- 100% of pharmacists involved said the programme met their expectations and that they would want to be involved in continued mentoring initiatives.
- Improvements were seen in confidence and competence with reflective practice for the mentees.
- Improvements were seen for the mentors in their mentoring skills such as setting clear goals, acknowledging strengths, setting expectations and asking powerful questions.

Who is involved?

This initiative is pharmacy-led and it is pharmacist volunteers who are driving this work nationally. The mentoring programme is for pharmacists, by pharmacists and is simply facilitated and supported by the IOP Mentoring Programme Team.

The **IOP Mentoring Programme Team** includes accredited coaches and a Mentoring Programme Manager to deliver a programme that is evidence based yet flexible in structure to accommodate the realities of the profession day to day.

“I was initially nervous that I mightn't be able to help my mentee as he was working in a different sector- the worry was gone at the 1st meeting. The setting is different but it was easy to relate to what he was saying.”



Riona Tumelty
Senior Pharmacist in Oncology Clinical Trials at Tallaght University Hospital.

“My mentee helped me develop my communication and leadership skills.

He gave me a new perspective on things and I learned a lot in the process.

It impressed me how much he achieved in such a short timeframe and it was nice to know I helped in some way



Riona Tumelty
Senior Pharmacist in Oncology Clinical Trials at Tallaght University Hospital.

The **Mentoring Steering Group** is sponsored by the Executive Director of the Institute, Dr Catriona Bradley, who is also an accredited coach. The steering group's role is to ensure appropriate governance and oversight of the programme and includes members of the programme team, influential members of the pharmacy profession as well as learning and development specialists.

More than 100 Pharmacists are now part of the **CONNECT Mentoring community** who meet quarterly to connect, learn new skills and discuss mentoring and its practice in Pharmacy.

This community is supported by **10 Mentoring Ambassadors** - pharmacists from across the profession who are leading the charge in bringing mentoring and its principles to life in pharmacy.

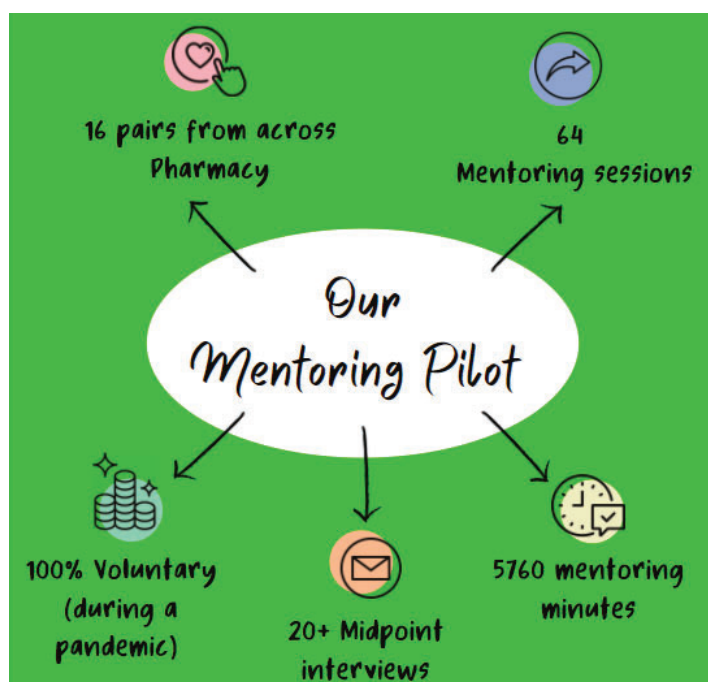
Here, two of our ambassadors share their experiences of being involved in the pilot mentoring programme.

How can pharmacists who are interested in mentoring get involved?

1. Sign up for some Mentoring Skills Training

Since 2019 over 100 Pharmacists have completed Mentoring Skills Training to date with additional training sessions to be offered in early 2022. The response to the training, run in conjunction with Kingstown College, has been hugely positive with pharmacists appreciating the practicality of the content and how applicable it is to their day to day work. Here's what some of the previous participants had to say about the programme;

“I found it really interesting and helpful, and not purely from a professional perspective. The facilitator did a great job of keeping



the course running on track and making us all feel comfortable to express opinion and ask questions. I liked the added references the facilitator gave us to back up points in the learning, and also liked to hear from other participants - it was more interesting since many of us worked in different areas."

"My listening skills, with colleagues, manager and patients have been positively affected. I think the recommendations of assigning goals and assessing progress will stand to me and encourage me to professionally not shy away from challenges. It has made me realise that I would really like to take part in a formal mentoring contract, both as a mentee and a mentor, in the future."

2. Join the CONNECT Mentoring Community

Our new CONNECT Mentoring community will give pharmacists who are interested in mentoring a place to come together as a community to connect, learn and share. As a member of the mentoring community you will receive regular updates on the programme and be invited to CONNECT events where you can;

- CONNECT with like-minded pharmacists across the profession on a quarterly basis at events, exclusive to you.
- LEARN about putting mentoring skills into practice and how the mentoring programme is developing. Think peer-led,

bite size, practical learning as well as regular updates on the programme.

- SHARE your ideas and your feedback so that together, we continue to build on the great work already happening.

The IIOp are committed to supporting this CONNECT community to shape the future of mentoring for pharmacy. So far, we have invited pharmacists to join this CONNECT community if they have either completed the IIOp Mentorship Skills Training and/or participated in our recent Pilot Mentoring Programme. If you would like to get involved get in touch with the IIOp Mentoring Programme Team at mentoring@iioop.ie.

It is time to cultivate a culture of mentorship within the Irish pharmacy profession. You can find out more on the Mentoring Homepage on the IIOp website.

About the IIOp

The role of the Irish Institute of Pharmacy (IIOp) includes the development and implementation of a CPD system for pharmacists in Ireland and the development of pharmacy practice in line with international best practice and evolving healthcare needs. The IIOp supports pharmacists to engage with CPD and commission education and training programmes in line with National Policy.



The Mentee's perspective - Providing me with the skills to navigate career steps with confidence and awareness

My name is Emer Lane and I am a community pharmacist in Cork. I qualified as a pharmacist in 2018 and have spent my career so far in community. I decided to take part in the IIOp Mentoring programme as I was at a crossroads in my career. I spent much of the pandemic in Dublin and found I needed a change and felt mentoring would provide me with the guidance I required.

A key part of my mentoring experience was reflective practice; reflective practice in terms of my actual practice as a pharmacist rather than focusing on the clinical attributes. Myself and my mentor, Clare Fitzell, spent time exploring the trials and triumphs of my current role: the aspects I enjoyed, the areas I needed to improve to bring more fulfilment to my day-to-day practice and areas I didn't enjoy - how could I tackle them in a different way to improve the overall outcome.

We discussed how important it is to have your own learning and development as an ongoing priority. To take every opportunity, try new things, different areas and allow yourself to create your own career path - not only to think outside the box but to have the mindset to think and act as though there is no box. I suppose to a certain extent we can as "newly-qualified pharmacists" assume a certain career path without intention, without considering what we really want and without realising the ability and capability of our degree and career skillset.

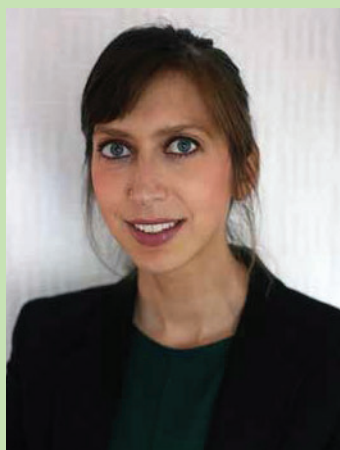
Clare encouraged me and continues to encourage me to be actively present in my role as a pharmacist. Make connections in a wider healthcare environment, increase your knowledge, gain various perspectives and skillsets

and most importantly be motivated and encouraged by what you do - be your own best advocate.

Very few times in your career will you have the protected time to work with a mentor - to reflect on where you are now, where you want to be and how to get there. Having a mentor has endless benefits, just think back to your pre-reg/intern year and all you gained from your tutor. Before I completed this programme, I had some experience of the advantages I would gain from it since I completed my pre-reg and foundation pharmacist training with Boots Ireland who champion a mentoring environment. This programme cemented for me the fundamental role this relationship has, especially in the early years of one's career. I kept notes from my meetings with Clare and know I will undoubtedly refer to them in the future. Clare has provided me with the skillset needed to navigate each career step with both confidence and awareness.

I will end in saying a simple thank you. Thank you Clare for your uplifting and inspiring words and your practical and sensible advice to help me navigate my career. I'll take with me that if you never try you will never know. It won't always be perfect, it won't always be easy, but it should always be rewarding. Have an appreciation for what you do - not everyone has the privilege of our career.

Emer Lane was partnered with Clare Fitzell, a mentor on the Pilot Programme



The Mentor's Perspective - A refreshing experience which helped me see I have a lot to give

Participating as a mentor in the Pilot Mentoring Programme was a refreshing experience. This opportunity helped me to regain my own confidence in the knowledge, skills, experiences that I have gained throughout my time as a pharmacist. Initially I was a little dubious that I would have what it took to help guide and advise my mentee, a newly qualified pharmacist, but the pilot experience really helped me to see that I have a lot to give.

I met with my mentee roughly every three weeks over a three-month period. We scheduled our meetings in advance for a time that suited us both and used Zoom to host the meeting. Although many people had become used to using online platforms for meetings, I wasn't, so was apprehensive about getting to know my mentee and sharing my own experiences this way. I settled in quickly though and loved the convenience of the online meetings. I was surprised how easily I could build rapport with my mentee and this in turn made for effective mentoring sessions.

Feedback following the pilot was positive and encouraging, boosting my own confidence and reassuring me that I could make a difference to the concerns and dilemmas of a fellow pharmacist. The opportunity for my mentee to be heard was highly valued and appreciated by my mentee. I'm glad that I could share uncomfortable and difficult lessons I have experienced over my career so that my mentee could learn from them. I encourage every pharmacist to consider taking part in this rewarding programme.

Nadira Callachand