

Submission by the Irish Medical Organisation to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children regarding the Centralisation of Medical Card Services
23rd February 2010

In relation to the motion on the Centralisation of Medical Card Services to be debated on Wednesday 24th February 2010, the Irish Medical Organisation (IMO) would like to bring to the attention of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children administrative difficulties that have arisen in relation to the validation of medical cards.

Since mid 2009, GP members of the IMO have experienced substantial difficulties regarding the validation of medical cards with patients presenting to GPs with apparently valid cards which are subsequently deemed to have been withdrawn or suspended.

The IMO surveyed GP members and found such issues widespread throughout the country. For example one GP in Louth said that 37 patients on a local list received letters with GMS numbers but the patients were not on the national list when checked online. Another GP in Limerick found on PCRS system that 76 patients had been deleted on 01/01/2010 with no letter received by either the GP or the patients. A number of GPs in the Dublin region said their patients experienced long delays in renewing their cards as well as difficulties contacting their local HSE office.

The data gathered points to systemic problems in relation to the administration of medical cards including:

- Differences between national and local lists of GMS patients (with the PCRS only making payments in respect of the national list);
- The PCRS is not always advising (particularly those over 70years of age) that their medical card is due to expire and when such notifications are issued no renewal forms accompany the letter;
- Patients whose eligibility has expired but is not reflected in the expiry date on the card;
- The system is not sufficiently responsive to the needs of vulnerable patients, such as those who may have literacy problems or who do not have internet access;
- Patients are refused medical cards even though they meet the eligibility criteria
- Patients experience unacceptably long delays (between 2-6months) renewing cards;
- Lack of transparency in respect of eligibility for elderly patients in residential care.

These issues present substantial difficulties for patients who believe they have an entitlement to GP services by virtue of what they believe to be a valid medical card. And find themselves exposed to the full cost of private medical services until their cards are reinstated. GPs and their practice staff are also left to communicate the loss of a medical card to their patients in addition to difficulties with reconciliation of PCRS lists and payments.

The IMO request that the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children address these issues as a matter of urgency and are available for further consultation.