



PHARMACIST
SUPPORT

Confronting the pharmacy facts:- the challenges & support needs

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Pharmacist Support is the profession's independent charity.

Established in 1841, the organisation has provided a lifeline to thousands of pharmacists and their families and pharmacy students struggling with a range of challenges. The Charity's free and confidential support includes an information and enquiry service, a wellbeing service, financial assistance and advice, employment advice and addiction support.

In 2008, following extensive market research involving pharmacists from all sectors of the profession, the trustees embarked on an ambitious project to re-launch the charity. Since then Pharmacist Support has seen a dramatic increase in demand for its services and experienced a shift in the demographics of its service users from the elderly and retired towards working pharmacists, particularly those in the early stages of their career.

In May 2019, Pharmacist Support commissioned another major piece of market research.

The Charity wanted to take the opportunity to:



gauge awareness of its current service offering



identify and understand the issues affecting those in the sector today



review the needs of its existing and potential service users and supporters



explore opportunities for partnership and fundraising



and investigate any potential barriers to engagement



The Charity commissioned Manchester-based Tipi Research to support the delivery of this project. Over the course of almost three weeks we sought feedback from individuals to gain a greater understanding of the needs of the profession. We received nearly 500 responses to our online survey with a representative sample across the different areas of pharmacy as well as from students, pre-registration trainees and retired pharmacists. Of those who responded, only a third had either used the Charity's services or donated to the Charity in the past, the remainder being individuals who were unknown to the Charity as either service users or financial supporters.

To supplement the survey Tipi conducted a series of in-depth, one-hour interviews with existing and potential service users, donors and partner organisations. This provided some extremely useful insights into the key challenges and needs of the profession, with both interview and survey findings being used to inform the Charity's new five-year strategy.

These findings have highlighted some major concerns around stress and wellbeing, therefore, we have decided to launch the results publicly to help raise awareness in the sector and to support the activities of many of our partners working with pharmacists.

"With the current stress levels with the challenging environment of pharmacy, I think that having a charity just for the pharmacy workforce is very important."

Community Pharmacist



WHAT WE LEARNT ABOUT THE CHARITY

“Timely and informative response. The high standard of expertise and knowledge base of staff within the organisation is impressive.”

“They were wonderful to me. They gave me lots of support and advice. They were lifesavers at the time.”



We have a strong foundation to build on: those already engaged with Pharmacist Support are big advocates of the Charity. Current donors recognise and very much value the Charity’s role and the services it provides.



There is a huge need for the Charity. Overwhelmingly, **97%** (figure one) of respondents said they need some kind of support from the Charity, with:

61%

of pharmacist respondents saying they need support with stress at work

47%

of pharmacist respondents saying they need support managing their wellbeing

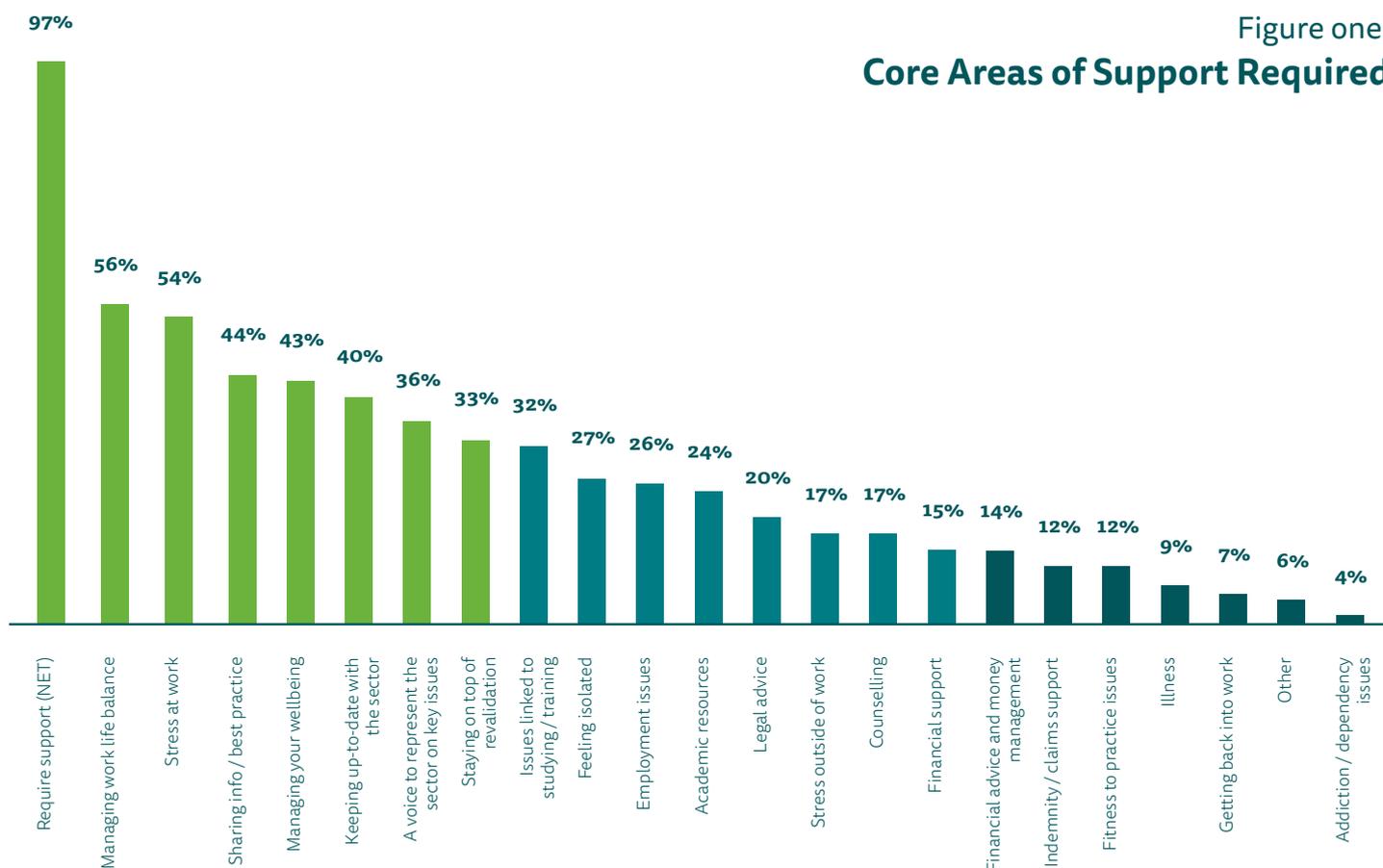
59%

of pharmacist respondents saying they need support with their work-life balance



Figure one:

Core Areas of Support Required



What else we learnt:



We're operating in clear white space. There's a lot of professional support for pharmacists but we are unique in our offer of personal support for pharmacists focused on an individual's wellbeing.



Lack of awareness and knowledge of Pharmacist Support and how it is funded are core barriers to engagement. Six in ten people in our sample have never heard of us with many who have not donated to us citing not knowing we are a charity/ fundraising organisation.



While the services we offer are clearly highly relevant to the needs of the profession, a dearth of knowledge about them is hampering engagement.



People want to hear more - 92% of survey respondents agreed that 'more needs to be done to raise awareness of issues facing the pharmacy profession' and that Pharmacist Support should be one of the organisations helping to do this.

"There are no other organisations that focus on the wellbeing and welfare of pharmacists. It's important for them to add that richness."

"I didn't expect help with employment and financial advice. I did see it as a counselling thing."

Primary Care Pharmacist



“Pharmacist Support are able to tell the individual stories about the impact of issues on pharmacists that often get lost.”

“I think there needs to be more awareness made in universities about what the charity offers.”

“Pharmacist Support doesn’t have a conflict of interests like other organisations because it’s a charity.”

Community Pharmacist

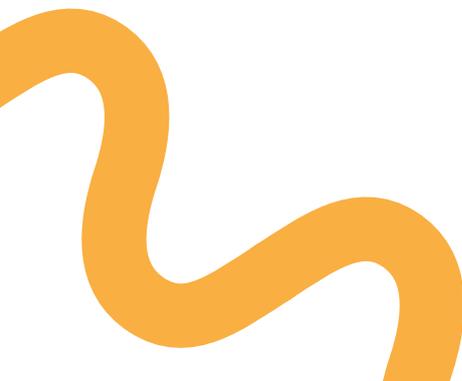
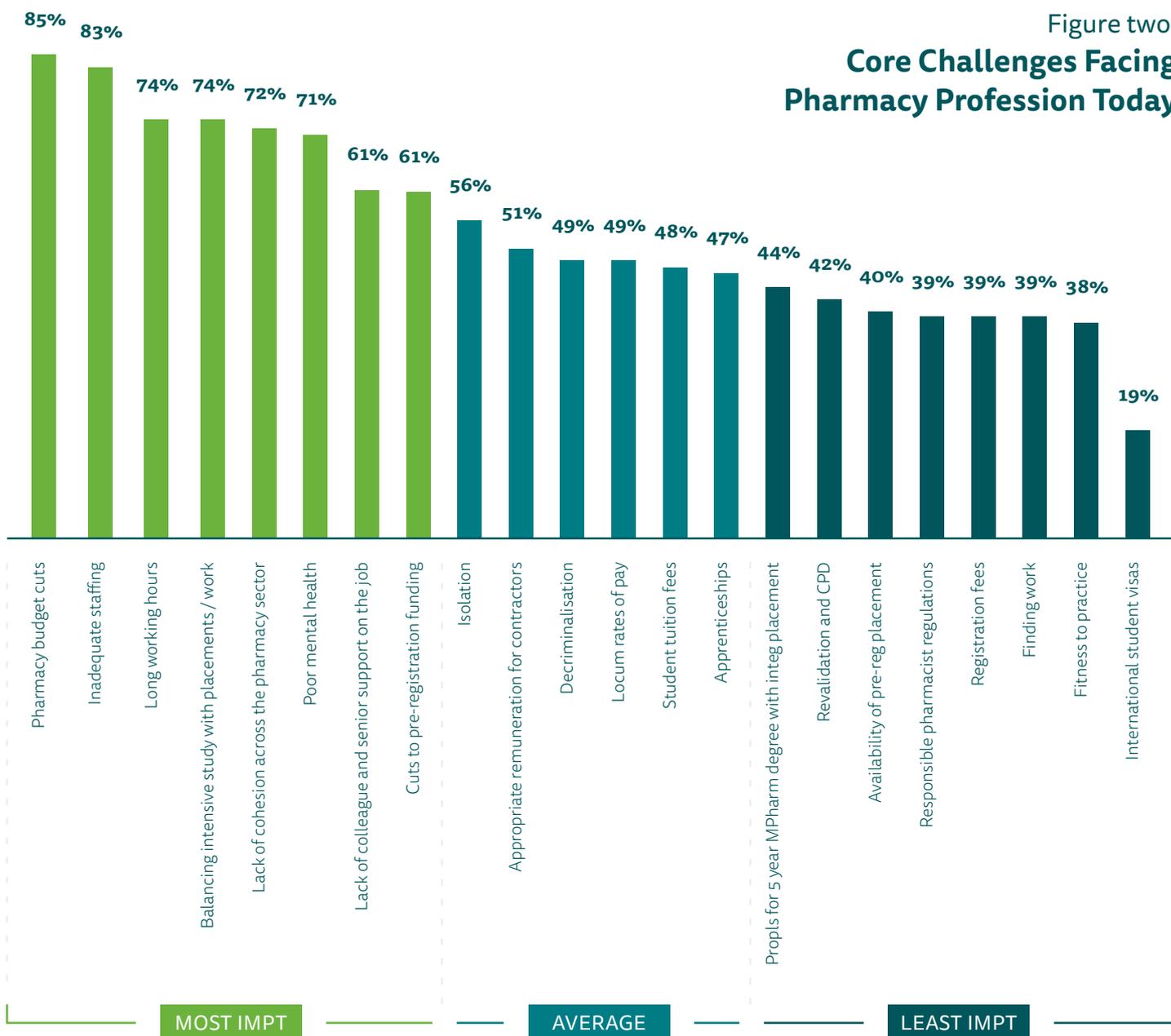
“I will definitely donate in the future, Pharmacist Support saved me twice. Any little donation counts.”

Primary Care Pharmacist



CHALLENGES FACING THE SECTOR

From the results of this research the emerging picture we see is of a sector with ever-increasing demands and constraints being placed upon it. There are concerns about widespread funding cuts that are leading to issues around staffing levels. The full range of challenges is set out in figure two below.

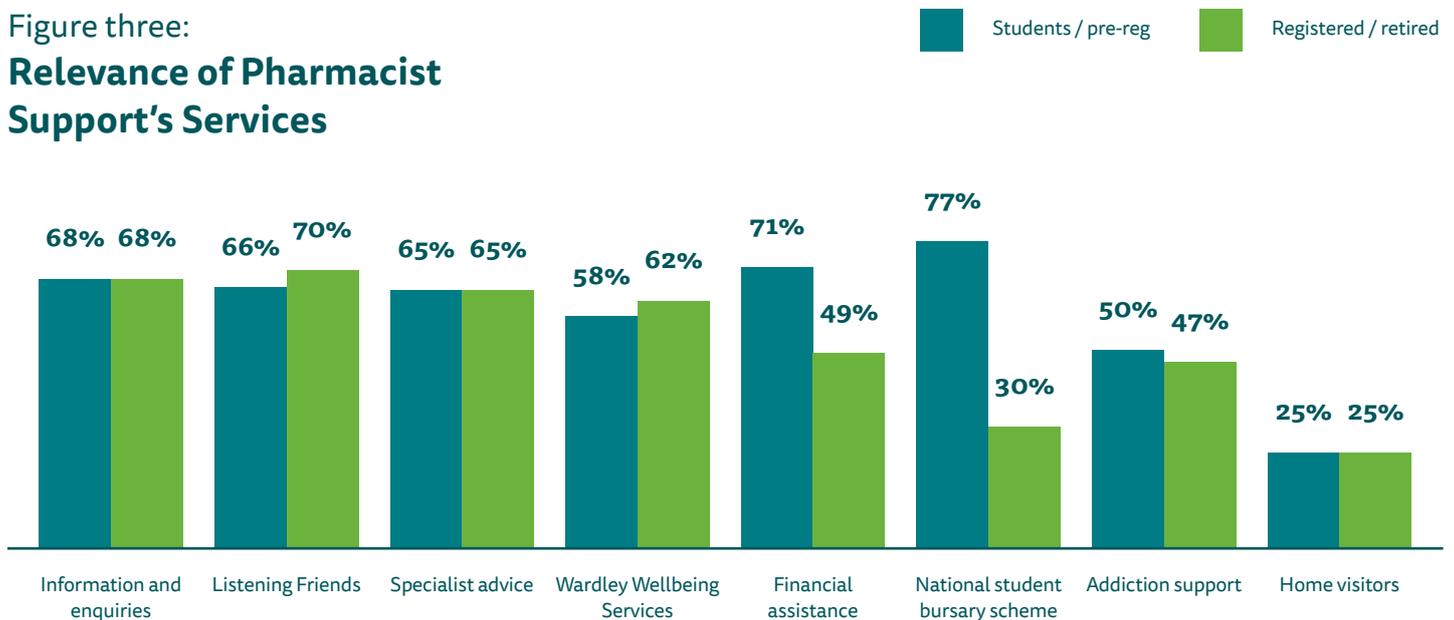


PHARMACY BUDGET CUTS

A resounding 85% of respondents in our research identified the impact of the funding cuts on the sector as a “core challenge” facing the profession today, followed very closely by inadequate staffing. For pharmacists working in a community setting, this figure is even more dramatic – with 97% of these respondents identifying budget cuts being a core challenge.

Figure three:

Relevance of Pharmacist Support's Services



Outlined in figure three is the relevance of each of the Charity's services to the two groups - students/pre-reg and registered/retired pharmacists. Forty-nine percent of the pharmacists we surveyed who had not used our services, identified a need for the Charity to provide a financial assistance programme, suggesting at the very least a widespread awareness of financial problems within the sector.

Pharmacist Support's ability to directly address this issue in the sector is limited given the scale of financial problems implied by our research. Nonetheless, the Charity is fortunate to be in a position to provide meaningful relief to those pharmacists who find themselves in financial difficulty through tailored advice and our financial assistance programme.

Between 2014 – 2018 the charity provided financial assistance to over 600 people. It is common to find individuals seeking financial assistance citing problems at work as the root cause of their situation.

“I have been experiencing issues with my pay recently... I have not been paid in full for months and am now owed over £2,000. I have a mortgage to pay, utility bills, child care costs and credit card and loan payments and cannot afford them on the money I currently have.”

Continued funding pressures on the sector threaten to further increase the number of pharmacists needing financial support. In the absence of radical and rapid change it is likely that the Charity will see more and more cases of hardship in the next few years.

WORK LIFE BALANCE AND STRESS

Fifty-six per cent of all survey respondents cited 'managing work-life balance' and 54% cited 'stress at work' as something they felt they needed support with. For those who had already used the Charity's services, our research shows that 29% first contacted the Charity due to stress at work, with this group over three times more likely to say they contacted us for help with work-related stress.

"It's quite a stressful place to be nowadays with the amount of workload, especially with all the cutbacks."

Community Pharmacist

Our research also highlighted differences in the impact of stress and the subsequent wellbeing needs of different age groups. A significantly higher proportion (70%) of 36-45 year-old pharmacists cited work-life balance and stress at work as a support need, compared with between 47% to 59% for other age groups.

"I wish I knew about them sooner."

MENTAL HEALTH

As a charity focused on the wellbeing of those who belong to the profession, we are particularly alarmed to report that 71% of respondents identified mental health as a major issue facing the sector with 56% describing isolation as a specific problem.

Community pharmacists consistently stood out in our research as having the biggest concerns about their general wellbeing. While concerns about mental health stood out in the overall sample, 78% of community pharmacists identified it as one of their key issues, and 68% agreed isolation was a key problem – very close to double the proportion of hospital pharmacists thinking isolation was a core challenge.

Community pharmacists were also much more likely to express concern about long working hours (76%) and lack of support from colleagues (70%). Twenty-six per cent of respondents to our market research who had used our services stated that managing their wellbeing was the first reason they contacted the charity, and it is easy to understand why.



"I was struggling with my mental wellbeing shortly after qualifying. I felt alone in a new job with a new company and my life outside of work also had some difficult circumstances, so I felt I had no part of my life that was being kind to me."

"I had an episode last year with mental health where I had to take a lot of time off. I was out of work for about 6 months at least. They gave me advice on how to stay on top of my CPD. They helped me financially as well."

Community Pharmacist

"They sound really good. Wardley Wellbeing...so that doesn't actually say you have to be ill or anxious or depressed, things to help you manage those, that would definitely be of interest to me."

Community Pharmacist



DIFFERING NEEDS OF OUR BENEFICIARIES

Although no other issues dominated in the minds of our respondents quite as strongly as the ones covered, there are other areas of concern that come into sharp focus when we look at the different segments within the sample. Eighty-four per cent of current pre-registration trainees and pharmacy students expressed serious concerns about the impact of cuts to training funding. More than half of all current would-be pharmacists (54%) are seriously worried about how difficult it is to find work as a pharmacist.

Registered pharmacists on the other hand were disproportionately concerned about low sector cohesion, with four-fifths (80%) identifying this as a critical challenge for pharmacy, and 60% feeling problems with remuneration for contractors was a priority issue (a figure that rises to 79% for community pharmacists).

Our market research responses also revealed some interesting gender differences. We found that female respondents were more likely to report stress at work than males (58% to 51%) but that men were more likely to say that they need help with managing their work-life balance (62% to 54%). Men are also more likely to feel that isolation is a core challenge, at 63% compared to 54% of women.

Women were much more likely to be concerned about keeping up to date with pharmacy standards and practice – almost half of women (46%) identified this as a major worry compared to just under a quarter of men (24%).

4% of respondents told the Charity that they thought they would benefit from an addiction support service, and men were three times as likely as women to identify the work we do around addiction support as one of the Charity's most valuable services.

“With their support I have got my career back and my life has changed for the better. I continue to support others through the telephone support group which was set up to help with addictions and fitness to practice issues.”



Thank you

Pharmacist Support would like to thank all who generously gave their time to and supported this important piece of work.

It is our ambition to use this information to champion the wellbeing of the pharmacy family - to raise awareness of the challenges impacting those in the profession today, to ensure there is a relevant and useful support offering available to those who need it and to bring people together in partnership to improve and support the wellbeing of individuals in the profession.

"A few years back, I was extremely low regarding the struggles / challenges as a pharmacist in practice. I did not know who to go to or where to turn to. I found Pharmacist Support online at the time and contacted them for advice. I always remember this and thank you."

