

MEDIA RELEASE

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Safe pharmacy practice focus in face of low pass rate for pharmacy interns, Pharmacy Council says

The Pharmacy Council is concerned that this year's Assessment Centre pass rate for pharmacy interns is lower than it has ever been, but says it is important to maintain safe pharmacy practice.

Chief Executive Michael Pead says the Assessment Centre results saw 47% of 208 eligible interns pass, compared to a usual pass rate of nearer 70%.

The assessment is the final step for pharmacy interns to qualify to practice, without supervision, as pharmacists. Interns work through ten cases that replicate real-life situations that occur in pharmacy practice. Each case is written and reviewed by at least 30 different pharmacists from the profession, and on the assessment day, 60 pharmacists take part as assessors.

“This assessment is to ensure interns can demonstrate an appropriate level of pharmacist skills and knowledge to safely practice on their own. It is a vital final step of the qualification process to help ensure the safety and wellbeing of patients.”

“It is difficult to know why the pass rate is significantly lower this year, but Covid may well be a factor as interns do need to get sufficient practical experience during their training in order to have the necessary skills to pass the exam.” It is also notable that lower pass rates are being experienced in health and other sectors, locally and internationally.

The Council has reviewed the examination set for interns and is confident of its integrity, which has also been confirmed through psychometric analysis. The Pharmaceutical Society, as the key deliverer of the Assessment Centre, has also stated that they are confident that the standards of assessment and all related processes have been completed to the usual high standard.

Michael Pead says improving the success rate of interns qualifying to practice will be the focus of the next education provider forum the Pharmacy Council is hosting in the New Year.

The Pharmacy Council is aware the reduced number of interns qualified to enter the workplace as registered pharmacists will be of concern to the pharmacy sector.

“We know it will add to the workload stress for pharmacists in what is already an extremely tight labour market. It is also, however, vital that any intern qualified to practice alone is safe to do so.”

Most interns who did not pass this year's assessment have the opportunity to re-sit the exam in six months' time.

“The expectation would be that those who did not succeed in passing the assessment this year will be supported in continuing to develop their pharmacist skills, putting them in a strong position to re-sit and pass the assessment next May.”

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