

# Nigel Moloney on Navigating Pharmacy

**There are few areas of the pharmacy world where Nigel Moloney hasn't served his time.**

From working as a hospital pharmacist, to clinical development with one of the world's healthcare giants, to marketing, to working across four retail pharmacies, a wholesaler and providing dedicated healthcare to Cork's homeless community, Nigel - a finalist in IPN's People's Pharmacist of the Year contest last year - has crammed a lot into his 24-year career to date.



He's speaking to us today from Carrigaline CarePlus Pharmacy in Cork, where he is vaccinating hundreds of people every week with booster or first-time doses against coronavirus. In the run up to Christmas, his clinics were attracting 500 customers a week.

Having studied Pharmacy in Brighton, Nigel completed his pre-reg training before working as a hospital pharmacist in Southampton for four years.

From there, he joined Roche to work as a Clinical Pharmacology Manager for a further four years: "That was such fascinating work. Being part of the team, which was managing clinical trials including the point where medicines are first

administered to volunteers was a real privilege." His next step was into a stint in marketing and medical affairs with the healthcare giant, before he made the decision to return to Ireland in 2007.

It wasn't long before Nigel met Mark Ledwidge and Kevin Hales, and they embarked on a partnership that would lead to a number of retail pharmacy projects in Cork city. "The first location, at South Terrace, meant a lot of our local customers were members of the homeless community, while some were also living in Direct Provision, and they would come to us after visiting their GP next door.

We saw an opportunity to deliver healthcare services to these

communities in a more structured way. Fifteen years on, we have developed a great relationship with the clients and service providers, particularly among the homeless community.

We go into the shelters and look at their meds on a weekly basis. We dispense medicines, collect their empties and check to see if anyone is skipping their meds, which can be really important information to be able to pass onto meds if they run into any health problems.

We wanted to make sure anybody who gets their medicines delivered from the pharmacy to a residential setting is getting the same service given to someone who walks in and collects the medicines themselves.

Nigel Moloney is continuing to build on his professional skills and recently qualified as a phlebotomist.  
*Photo: Brian Loughheed*

Now, we have two dedicated technicians for residential settings as well as a driver, and I'm also providing a street-medicine pharmacist service which I'd like to expand in the future. I don't believe anyone else is running this kind of service in Ireland, but it's proved so valuable to the people we're serving. There is a similar service in Glasgow, where they have the added benefit of being able to prescribe medication to service users, and this is something I would hope will become available through legislation in Ireland in time.



The response we get from clients in these settings is wonderful. For them, having a single person they can talk to about their health concerns is fantastic. On the other side, the medical and homeless services have really embraced the opportunity to contact a trusted professional they know via phone or text, perhaps to solve a problem at short notice.

I'm usually in shelters each Friday evening dropping off supplies and I get to have a chat with the residents. I know most of the people now and it's really rewarding work."

The dispensary facility required for this outreach work rapidly outgrew the space at its original South Terrace premises, so it was moved to another of Nigel's pharmacies in Douglas (recently rebranded as Ardfallen StayWell Pharmacy), before ultimately finding a home at Carrigaline CarePlus Pharmacy.

This is where Nigel began his relationship with CarePlus Pharmacy, back in 2017. "They came to us with the opportunity to take on a unit in the new Primary Care Centre in Carrigaline. We thought it was a brave move as some of the biggest players in the local scene were already in the town. It's been a fantastic experience and we've really

established a presence in the community. Being part of a group like CarePlus Pharmacy offers benefits like buying power on a great range of stock items, excellent training in world-class retail technology systems and a fresh design approach, while retaining the ability to run my business my way."

The network of franchised pharmacies, owned and managed by community pharmacists, aims to provide a superior pharmacy experience in a friendly, local environment. The group now operates in over 60 key locations around Ireland and is part of the Navi Group.

Nigel has further strengthened his reputation for community activity through his Christmas outreach programmes to support men and women living in homelessness in Cork. In 2020 and 2021, for example, Nigel and his team partnered with local charities to deliver more than 500 care packs to vulnerable people.

Director of Marketing at CarePlus Pharmacy, Lee-Ann McCarthy, praised Nigel's approach to community pharmacy: "Nigel has been a major asset to our group since he joined with his phenomenal positive attitude and dedication to helping those in

need. He's constantly innovating and further developing his team's offering for customers and is a wonderful example of just how valuable a community pharmacist can be."

While building up these businesses, Nigel expanded his partnership with Mark Ledwidge and Kevin Hales to establish H & L Pharma, obtaining a wholesale licence with HPRA to distribute small volumes of high value medicines. "This has been a fascinating venture too, we worked in oncology for a number of years, but we've focused more on importation of unlicensed, assisted reproduction products of late, and Brexit has brought its own opportunities in that respect."

Nigel is continuing to build on his professional skills and recently qualified as a phlebotomist. "Once I got my training, I advertised to our customers that we could provide blood tests to check vitamin D levels, and they started asking what else I could do. We work with a private lab, so we can really offer a very wide range of checks, and it went from there. We also have our own in-house biochemistry point-of-care laboratory; the Roche Reflotron biochemistry analyser. This allows us to give people blood test results

Nigel with Noelle Hurley at Carrigaline CarePlus Pharmacy. He says he's proud of how his team stepped up to support customers through the pandemic.  
*Photo: Brian Loughheed*

while they wait as each parameter takes approximately two minutes to analyse and report the result. It's really taken off among our clients."

The combination of varied experience and time spent in the industry gives Nigel incredibly detailed insight into the pharmacy scene in Ireland: "I'm glad my career has evolved in the way it did - going from hospital experience into big pharma and then towards community pharmacy - each step has informed and prepared me for my current roles. It would have been much harder to do in reverse!"

Whatever 2022 may bring, the experience of working in healthcare during a pandemic will stay with Nigel for life: "As a community pharmacy, we did have an important role to play as a listening ear and a source of comfort for people. They were eager to get their hands on medical supplies of course, particularly sanitiser, gloves at first and then masks, and basic medication like paracetamol and ibuprofen, but they also valued our



Nigel Moloney at Carrigaline CarePlus Pharmacy, with staff members Catherine Deasy (l) and Rachel Williams.

Photo: Brian Loughheed

knowledge around doing what you can to stay safe. So many other places were shut at the start of the pandemic, and I was so proud of our team and how they stepped up to the mark to support our customers, when each of them was going through a testing time too."

The dad-of-three is also well placed to cast an eye to the future of the industry. "Change is constant in this job. Even at a clinical level - there are meds available now that we never thought possible when I trained first, like the treatments for HepC, previously seen as a lifelong problem, something on a par with HIV - now a course of treatment can actually cure patients altogether. It's inspirational, particularly when you work with parts of the community who would often record a higher incidence of this disease."

Nigel hopes that retail pharmacies' involvement in vaccine rollouts

in recent years will grow to become more of a routine service: "Pharmacists can easily get on board with providing all kinds of injectable services, from flu and COVID vaccines, to B12 and Prolia injections, travel vaccine services, and common jabs like those against chickenpox and shingles. Outside of vaccines, so many of our colleagues are providing antigen and PCR testing that it would be easy to make this more of a regular feature. I believe we could provide support for occupational safety services too, and this has been a big element of our contribution to keeping businesses open during this pandemic. Some days I have performed up to 100 nasopharyngeal swabs for the purpose of staff screening using antigen testing in factories.

In terms of how we deliver community pharmacy, digital technology is unquestionably the future. I've been really impressed by CarePlus Pharmacy's new digital offering, they are leading the way on this in Ireland. It's easy to forget that up until COVID struck, we were still relying on paper prescriptions! The rollout of

Ireland's electronic prescribing via Health Mail since 2020 has been a fantastic success and I believe that principle of guided automation should continue: the surgery mails the prescription to the store, the robot selects and dispenses the product, it's dropped to the till point where the pharmacist can check it and the customer is happy. Ultimately, the pharmacist will have more time to counsel the patient, check for any additional concerns and further build on their relationship, which is crucial in the world of community pharmacy."

CarePlus Pharmacy has opened multiple digital pharmacies across Ireland in the past two years. Customers and pharmacy teams have embraced the new look stores with their easy-to-use technological features. The biggest change in appearance, compared to a traditional pharmacy, is the absence of overcrowding of shelving units on the shop floor. Customers find more open space in the stores and can use touchscreen technology to browse a range of product offerings. Once the customer has made a selection from the screen, the store robot promptly gets to work accessing

the stock area before delivering them to the till point, offering a seamless customer experience.

Software experts at Irish technology company, ScreenVend, designed the automated order filling system, which has been paired with the robotics expertise of German firm, Gollmann.

Nigel believes dispensaries with robotic technology also offer the opportunity to have a big pharmacy with a small footprint. "Companies could even develop kiosk-style outlets where the products are stored overhead or next door, and only dispensed when selected by the customer."

Apart from robot-enabled dispensaries, Nigel firmly believes pharmacy customers will soon be looking to the sky for their medicine: "Definitely, drone technology will be part of the scene in Ireland in the near future. Obviously, there are regulatory and safety requirements to address, but when you can already get ice-cream delivered via drone in Ireland, it's only a matter of time before your prescriptions land on your doorstep."