

February 2016

## **PSNC Briefing 016/16: Community Pharmacy Westminster Hall Debate**

On Tuesday 23rd March 2016, a parliamentary debate was held in Westminster Hall. The debate very clearly demonstrated the value of pharmacy presenting a united front, as numerous MPs told Pharmacy Minister Alastair Burt to stop and think again on his proposals for community pharmacy.

This briefing provides a summary of the debate, along with suggestions for LPCs to engage with MPs.

### **Debate summary**

On Tuesday 23rd March 2016 in Parliament, MPs from all parties debated the value of community pharmacies and expressed concerns about the Department of Health's December letter setting out wide ranging changes for the sector.

Derek Thomas, (Con, St Ives) led the debate and set out the value of pharmacies in rural constituencies such as his own, providing access to NHS support to vulnerable people. He said: "It is perverse that we judge reducing support for services such as community pharmacists to be a saving."

Thomas went on to explain that he understood that efficiency savings needed to be found across the sector, but that clarity was needed as to what exactly would be cut and where the money would be found. He suggested that savings could be found by making better use of pharmacy, or by reducing prescription duration in order to cut down on medicines waste.

A number of MPs spoke in support of Thomas, often focusing on the potential for pharmacies and pharmacists to alleviate pressure on GPs and hospitals, as well as in filling some of the gaps created by cuts to local authority funding. MPs quoted figures supplied by PSNC and the other pharmacy bodies.

Thomas put three questions to the Minister. Firstly he asked if the Government had carried out impact assessments on the effects of reducing pharmacy numbers to local communities and health services. Secondly he asked what assurances could be given to independent community pharmacies, and thirdly about whether patients had been consulted about proposed changes.

Chair of the All Party Pharmacy Group, Kevin Barron (Lab, Rother Valley) agreed the DH letter in December had "posed more questions about the future of pharmacy than it gave answers." He said it had become clear that as many as 3,000 pharmacies could close and raised concerns about the transparency surrounding this. He stated that local independent pharmacies were likely to be under the greatest threat, as they did not have the same efficiencies of scale available to them as larger chain pharmacies. Following a briefing from the pharmacy bodies, Barron asked why NHS England was no longer interested in commissioning a national minor ailments service.

Stephen Pound (Lab, Ealing North) summarised points made by a number of others about the role of the "modern community pharmacist" whose skills needed to be protected.

Oliver Colville, Vice-chair of the All Party Pharmacy Group (Con, Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) argued that there was an oversupply or ‘clustering’ of pharmacies in some specific locations. However, he suggested that a change to funding across the board was a blunt instrument for addressing this.

Pound went on to ask for further consideration of whether “the Government’s proposal for a hub-and-spoke prescribing model, breaking the link between the patient and the pharmacist, represents value for money, or even sanity?” Though he said it made sense not to premeditate the outcome of the current consultation.

Mark Williams (Lib Dem, Ceredigion) and SNP spokesperson Roger Mullin (SNP, Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) both raised concerns from the devolved nations, since although the Government’s proposals would only affect England directly, they suggested there may be implications for their constituents, especially in terms of the consequences to future funding available.

Shadow health minister Barbara Keeley reiterated the importance of community pharmacies in rural areas and ‘under-doctored areas’, asking if the Minister could ensure that patients would not suffer as a result of proposed cuts and whether any further cuts were planned. She asked what levels of funding are planned for future years. Keeley questioned the extent to which the integration fund could mitigate any of these risks, and asked how pharmacists could be expected to invest in services in the face of budget cuts.

Pharmacy Minister Alistair Burt responded to the debate with a concession, admitting this would not be the last time the issue was discussed and that they were only at an “early stage of the negotiations between the Government and the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee”. He argued that this meant many of the questions raised by the debate could not be answered yet.

He offered warm words toward community pharmacy, saying he also wanted to work with NHS England to promote commissioning in line with the local health community. He specifically pointed towards the integration fund as something that pharmacies would be benefitting from.

On the potential access scheme, Burt said it will: “provide more NHS funds to certain pharmacies compared with others, considering factors such as location and the health needs of the local population”. He concluded by seeking to reassure MPs: “We are committed to maintaining access to pharmacies and pharmacy services.”

## MPs participating

The following MPs supported pharmacy in the debate, or indicated their support:

- Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con)
- Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD)
- John Spellar (Warley) (Lab)
- Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab)
- Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab)
- Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab)
- Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con)
- Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con)
- Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con)
- Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con)
- Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab)
- Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD)
- Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab)
- Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op)
- Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab)
- Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con)
- David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP)
- Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con)
- Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab)
- George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab)
- Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab)
- Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab)
- Rebecca Harris (Castle Point) (Con)
- Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
- Gary Streeter (Con, Devon South West) [Streeter chaired the debate, but expressed concerns about a pharmacy in Modbury in his constituency]

## Action for LPCs

LPCs should review whether their local MPs appear on the list above.

If your MP did attend the debate, it would be worth emailing them (you can find their email address from their website if you have not already contacted them) to thank them for speaking up for their local community pharmacies. You can then follow up on any ongoing dialogue you have with them or introduce the LPC, perhaps share any recent case studies, and suggest a meeting or offer to help to draft parliamentary questions.

If your MP did not attend the debate, you can email them (you can find their email address from their website if you have not already contacted them), sending them the link to the Hansard transcript here: [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm160223/halltext/160223h0001.htm#1602236100001](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm160223/halltext/160223h0001.htm#1602236100001) You can then follow up on any ongoing dialogue you have with them or introduce the LPC, perhaps share any recent case studies, and suggest a meeting or offer to help to draft parliamentary questions.

For further support and guidance following the December letter on the future of community pharmacy, please see [PSNC Briefing 007/16: Campaigning guidance for LPCs \(February 2016\)](#).

If you have queries on this PSNC Briefing or you require more information please contact [Zoe Smeaton, Head of Communications and Public Affairs](#).