

# Community Pharmacy: at the heart of public health

## Introduction

Public health challenges in England are wide-ranging and a major cause for concern as they are having a profound effect on the nation's health and economy.

The Government has set out its long-term vision for the future of Public Health (1) with a much wider focus on health and wellbeing, protecting the public from health threats and improving the healthy life expectancy of the population. Local government will be responsible for improving public health, giving them the freedom and funding to develop their own ways of improving public health and reducing health inequalities in their area.

The Government recognises pharmacy's role in improving public health and the vital part it can play in preventing ill health, and that community pharmacy is a valued and trusted public health resource (1). The 2011/12 NHS Operating Framework also states that evidence continues to build for the provision of public health services through community pharmacies (2).

The new Public Health system is expected to make use of a wider range of professionals to increase capacity and build robust, integrated public health networks operating at the heart of communities. Community pharmacy is ideally placed to help to improve the capacity and effectiveness of services and thus reduce health inequalities and improve health and wellbeing.

Opportunities identified for community pharmacy in the new Public Health service include NHS Health Checks, tackling drug and alcohol misuse, promoting healthy lifestyles and prevention of long term illness and increasing the uptake of seasonal flu vaccination (1). When looking at the development and implementation of public health services using the wider public health workforce, community pharmacy should be seen as an integral part of the solution to effectively maximise patients' access to

services, and as a means of achieving improved outcomes.

Community pharmacy can deliver these services and this resource presents the evidence to support their involvement in the development and delivery of public health services.

Community pharmacies are a valuable and trusted public health resource. With millions of contacts with the public each day, there is real potential to use community pharmacy teams more effectively to improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.

**Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our strategy for public health in England, DH 2010**

## Why pharmacy?

Community pharmacists have always played a role in promoting, maintaining and improving the health of the communities they serve. Over 10,500 community pharmacies in England are already providing a wide range of public health services that are easily accessible and cost effective. Based in the heart of the community, in rural as well as deprived inner city areas, where people live, work and shop, community pharmacy teams gain a particular understanding of the needs of members of their communities through daily interactions with patients and customers. Because of their convenient access to the public without the need for an appointment, visitors to pharmacies come from all sectors of the population and it has been shown that local pharmacy services are particularly valued by those without easy access to a car (3).

Community pharmacies are often patients' first point of contact, and, for some, their only contact with a healthcare professional. Pharmacists already make a significant contribution to public health by engaging with communities through day-to-day activities, which might include the provision



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of advice to parents of young children, visits to the homes of older and housebound people and advice on stop smoking.

Pharmacies are ideally placed in the heart of the community to access 'hard to reach' groups and thus reduce health inequalities and be instrumental in the radical changes envisaged. Often the only healthcare professional situated in areas of deprivation, community pharmacies are well-positioned to target the higher levels of obesity, smoking, and drug and alcohol misuse particularly associated with low income and deprivation (3).

Pharmacists are highly trained, skilled professionals who are part of the public health professional network and the potential to use pharmacy teams more effectively to improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities has been identified (1). As a patient facing service, pharmacy has a number of key attributes that fit well with promoting public health and preventative healthcare messages and delivering public health services to a wide cross-section of society.

Many critical roles in public health are played by people who will not be employed by Public Health England, but who will be part of a wider professional network. A very wide range of clinicians and other professionals - from GPs to dentists, pharmacists to nurses, allied health professionals to environmental health officers - have essential roles to play in improving and protecting population health and reducing health inequalities.

**Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our strategy for public health in England, DH 2010**

Enhanced pharmacy services, which include stop smoking services, sexual health and weight loss programmes, have been shown to

be an under-utilised resource that can deliver innovative, cost-effective public health services to patients in a highly accessible manner. These services can also help the NHS achieve its Quality, Innovation, Productivity and Prevention (QIPP) objectives (5).

It is important that NHS organisations continue to maintain and develop pharmaceutical services, including local enhanced services to meet pharmaceutical needs... Evidence continues to build for the provision of public health services through community pharmacies.

**2011/12 NHS Operating Framework DH 2010**

Public health is included within the current NHS community pharmacy contractual framework in England. Pharmacies already give proactive advice on wellbeing issues to people presenting prescriptions with diabetes, those at risk of coronary heart disease (particularly those with high blood pressure) and those who smoke or are overweight. In addition, they also provide advice and support for carers to help them in their caring roles. Each year pharmacies participate in up to six health promotion campaigns at the request of the PCT, to promote public health messages to the public visiting the pharmacy during specific targeted campaign periods (6). Nationally, Public Health England will influence the future contractual framework and locally commissioned services of the future (2).

When discussing local development of services, commissioners should engage with Local Pharmaceutical Committees (the local representative body recognised in statute) to discuss how community pharmacy can help improve public health services in your area.



## What contribution can community pharmacy make?

### Healthy Lifestyles

Healthcare services have been estimated to contribute only a third of the improvements that could be made in life expectancy - changing people's lifestyles and removing health inequalities contribute the remaining two thirds. Many of the biggest future threats to health, such as diabetes and obesity, are related to public health. Four behavioural risk factors - tobacco use, physical inactivity, excess alcohol consumption and poor diet - are the biggest behavioural contributors to preventable disease. Tackling behavioural risk factors is an issue across all ages (7).

### References

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