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PSNC Briefing 038/15: PSNC Update on negotiations on a national Minor Ailments Advice Service

In May 2015 PSNC and NHS Employers confirmed that they were in discussions about a national community pharmacy Minor Ailments Advice Service. This service would give patients access to advice and treatments for minor conditions without the need for them to visit their GP or another urgent care service.

PSNC had hoped that it would be able to reach agreement with the NHS on such a service as part of the 2015/16 settlement and in lengthy discussions with the NHS we had developed a detailed proposal for this. NHS England subsequently decided not to pursue this. This has been very disappointing and PSNC believes it will have a negative impact on both the NHS and patients, who are missing out on a valuable professional service that could both improve care and reduce pressures on GP practices and the wider health service.

PSNC believes that to bring most benefit a minor ailments advice service should encourage patients to use the community pharmacist as an alternative to a GP consultation for minor conditions, as well as promoting self-care. This will require the provision of evidence-based advice and support alongside the supply of appropriate medication. Such a service would require high quality data capture to ensure clinical records are adequate and that the impact of the service can be assessed, so it is vital that the costs of this are fully recognised and accounted for.

Although it is frustrating not to have been able to agree a national service as part of the 2015/16 settlement, it is vital that any service works for pharmacy in practice and is supported by fair funding to ensure it is sustainable. PSNC will continue to make the case for it and to seek to agree a service that is right for community pharmacies and patients.

Gary Warner, Chair of PSNC's Service Development Subcommittee, a PSNC Negotiating Team member, and an independent community pharmacy contractor

I am very disappointed that we were not able to agree a national minor ailments advice service as part of the 2015/16 settlement. I hope that the joint business cases we and the NHS have agreed to work on for possible future services will help to speed things up for future services so that we can see faster development of services that we know we will benefit pharmacies, the health service, and most importantly, patients.

Peter Cattee, Chair of PSNC's Funding and Contract Subcommittee, a PSNC Negotiating Team member, and CEO of PCT Healthcare

Community pharmacy has worked incredibly hard to make its case to the NHS; but it is clear that although many people, including politicians and policy makers in the health service, have heard this message, we still have more to do. This can be exasperating work.

Bharat Patel, a PSNC Negotiating Team member and an independent community pharmacy contractor

PSNC's Negotiating Team (NT) worked incredibly hard to get the best possible outcome for contractors in 2015/16, but while we know we have reached that position we are still disappointed that we were not able to finalise a minor ailments advice service (MAAS). Offering accessible advice and treatment for minor conditions is at the heart of what pharmacy can do and a national service could really start to relieve the pressure on the NHS. The NT, which

includes representatives of multiples and independent contractors, is already looking ahead and our priority is to try to agree an MAAS as soon as possible as well as pressing for other opportunities.

Sue Sharpe, PSNC CEO

There is a big distinction between schemes that use the professional skills of the pharmacist to advise patients on symptoms and treatment, and those that supply medicines to patients who would otherwise book a GP appointment simply to get a prescription. We believe that a service using community pharmacists' advice can make substantial inroads into the 50m GP appointments for minor ailments each year. But the scheme needs to be properly funded and the advice properly recorded.

Our negotiations were based on a shared understanding that community pharmacists would be funded to provide professional advice, supplying a medicine only where necessary. The last-minute decision not to commission the service represents a massive missed opportunity for the NHS.

FAQ. Will PSNC continue to press for a national MAAS?

We will continue to make the case for what a properly structured and funded service can do. But the specification and funding must be right.

FAQ: What will happen to local schemes?

There are many locally commissioned minor ailments schemes at present that use pharmacies to help GPs and patients and we are sure that LPCs will seek to ensure that the benefits of these are not lost and negotiate for pharmacies to continue or extend the current services.

If you have queries on this PSNC Briefing or you require more information please contact [Alastair Buxton, Director of NHS Services](#).