

July 2017

## **PSNC Briefing 048/17: Hosting a pharmacy visit for your local MP**

This PSNC Briefing provides guidance to help LPCs to organise successful visits to community pharmacies for local Members of Parliament.

### **Why organise a visit?**

Following the imposition of the two-year funding package for 2016/17 and 2017/18, it is more important than ever that community pharmacy builds positive relationships with local politicians. By educating and informing MPs about the value that community pharmacy delivers to local communities, our aim is to make the case and win their support for developing community pharmacy's role, but also to ensure they agree that further financial attrition must be prevented.

Now is an ideal time to organise a pharmacy visit. The unexpected result of the General Election means that the Conservative Party is a minority Government, relying on the support of the Democratic Unionist Party. Many Conservative MPs have greatly reduced majorities, and are keen to be seen supporting local causes and services, and hence likely oppose any unpopular cuts in local health provision. MPs from opposition parties will seek to take advantage of this fragile political balance by presenting themselves as the guardians of the NHS and social care services.

This political landscape provides LPCs with an opportunity to engage with their local MPs (whatever their political affiliation) in order to gain their support for community pharmacy services, and while they may not have time to fully appreciate the detail of policy, a visit to a local pharmacy will offer them a valuable snapshot of the range of services that pharmacies provide, their role in improving the community's health and wellbeing, and the opportunities you see for the development of pharmacy delivered health services. For new MPs, this is a chance to learn more about a valuable service being offered to their constituents; for returning MPs and those who have been engaged with pharmacy previously, it is a chance to be reminded of the value of pharmacy and to once again show their support for the sector.

### **Organising the visit: step by step guide**

**1) Identify your MP** – now that the General Election is over it is important to identify who your MP is, which Party they belong to and if they serve as a Minister or front bench spokesperson. If they were elected prior to 2017 there will likely be some record of what they have championed or spoken about in Parliament. This could include community pharmacy. You may be able to find information through web searches, or through the MP's own website. Look out for links in their background or their parliamentary career to date to healthcare or community pharmacy that might provide a talking point or a hook for a visit. If you already have a relationship with the MP then you will of course know all of this, and you may be able to pick up on some of your previous conversations with them.

Make sure that you invite the MP to visit a pharmacy within their constituency. The following website has a search function which will allow you to easily find your MP: [www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps](http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps)

**2) Choose the pharmacy for the visit with care** – the pharmacy you choose needs to demonstrate community pharmacy at its best. Whether this is because of its accessibility or the quality and range of services provided, make

sure the pharmacy you choose can be an excellent showcase for the whole sector. Try to arrange the visit at a busy (but not too busy) time of day when there is a steady stream of patients and visitors. MPs will appreciate not just the opportunity to talk to the pharmacy team, but also members of the public who make use of the services available.

**3) Make the right approach** – unless an LPC has a personal relationship with their local MP, they are best reached by their Parliamentary email address. The visit should be billed as an opportunity for Parliamentarians to see first-hand the work their local pharmacy teams do, as well as to better understand the challenges they face. Many MPs are keen to show their constituents that they are supporting local health services, often through their website or on social media. It would therefore be useful to emphasise the chance to have a photograph taken, and show support for a highly valued team of health professionals on the high street. A template email invitation is included as **Appendix 1**.

Depending on the time available, a visit may provide an opportunity to discuss pharmacy policy or the funding settlement. Be aware that the visit may be short, due to MPs' diary pressures. MPs appreciate you getting to the point quickly. This means you need to be clear about what you want them to understand and how you would like them to support you. Be ready for the question: "How do you want me to help and what do you want me to do?". MPs can table questions in Parliament, write privately to Ministers or make contact with CCGs and others responsible for planning and delivering local care. They can also support the work of the All-Party Pharmacy Group in Parliament – make sure you ask to them to do so. PSNC can help you with any of these follow-up actions. Please email [Zoe Long](mailto:Zoe.Long@psnc.org.uk) or [Melinda Mabbutt](mailto:Melinda.Mabbutt@psnc.org.uk) for help.

**4) Publicise the visit!** – a pharmacy visit is an ideal opportunity to generate local press coverage, and cement awareness of pharmacy's central role within the community.

- Contact your local newspapers in advance of the visit, and make them aware of the date and time of the visit – they may want to send along a photographer.
- Take photographs of the visit, for you to use with social media, for a press release and to share with the MP, and with the local paper if they are not sending a photographer along.
- Many MPs have an online presence, so make sure that a photograph of the visit is shared on Twitter and Facebook, as well as Instagram, LinkedIn and any other available channels.
- Prepare a press release in advance, to release the day after the visit. The release should be eye catching, without being sensational. Use it to fly the flag for the work of community pharmacists: give an overview of the purpose of the visit and detail the individuals present. Use quoted remarks from the pharmacist or someone in the pharmacy team, and if possible from a supportive patient, and see if they MP will lend their name to a quote in the press release too. All of that makes it more interesting for local media and more likely to be reported. If you invite a CCG representative to join the visit, a quote from them is a useful addition too. Quotes can be written and agreed in advance, or on the day, or shortly afterwards. The MP and other attendees are usually happy to review a quote you draft for them, but make sure you get their approval before sending out the release. An example of a press release you could use is included in **Appendix 2**.
- Keep an eye out for any coverage!

**5) Follow up!** – post-event, thank those involved in the visit, particularly the MP and their diary manager. There may be an opportunity to provide them with a further briefing, or to put them in touch with PSNC on specific points that arose during the visit.

**6) Report back to local pharmacy contractors** – make sure you tell your contractors about the visit and any outcomes; it may inspire them to get involved in lobbying parliamentarians in the future. You can also let the national pharmacy organisations know about the visit by emailing [team@pharmacymanifesto.com](mailto:team@pharmacymanifesto.com)

## The visit: Tone, Content & Key Messages for Pharmacy

The purpose of a pharmacy visit is to create a positive impression of community pharmacy, demonstrating pharmacy's assets and potential, both in terms of service provision and in its role in improving the nation's health.

It is important to keep the visit positive and focused on the local constituency.

Our message is that faced with congestion in A&E departments, busy GP surgeries and rising demand for social care, it is more important than ever that we make best use of the network of community pharmacies on our high streets to keep people healthy and out of hospitals. We must work more closely with GPs, whatever the challenges, and do more both to help patients manage long term conditions and to support people in leading healthy lifestyles. We want to do that by working with government to make the most of the valuable network of community pharmacies and developing new pharmacy services together.

There are a number of background briefings and infographics that you may be able to refer to on the PSNC website. These include:

- **[Protecting local health services: using community pharmacy](#)** (and [references](#))  
This briefing was originally intended for Parliamentary Candidates, but it could still be used to provide information for new and returning MPs. It details alternative ways that community pharmacy could save the NHS money, the current funding situation and the potential for pharmacy teams to do more.
- **[Community Pharmacy Forward View infographic flyer](#)** (and [references](#))  
This flyer describes how implementing the [Community Pharmacy Forward View](#) (CPFV) could help the NHS to cope with the pressures it is currently facing.
- **[Value of pharmacy infographic](#)** (and [references](#))  
This one-page infographic has been developed to help get across the key findings from the [PricewaterhouseCoopers \(PwC\) report](#) on the value of pharmacy.
- **[Support Your Local Pharmacy flyer](#)**  
This flyer highlights the value that community pharmacies can bring to their local communities and provides information on ways local politicians can help support their work.
- **[Community Pharmacy Value flyer](#)**  
This flyer highlights the value of community pharmacy.

Remember that your MP will primarily be interested in local matters, so although these can provide useful discussion aids, you should also try to think of ways in which you can bring a local angle or story to them as well.

## Top tips for the visit

- Keep the visit positive.
- Ask the MP to back their local pharmacies, support the case for developing more services, and write to the health minister, ask parliamentary questions and support the All-Party Pharmacy Group.
- Take a photo of the visit.
- Base the conversation around clear key messages.
- Stay away from technical terms and policy detail.
- Take time to prepare.
- Don't be party-political.
- Steer conversations away from complaints.

## More information

If MPs ask for more information on community pharmacy, or you need any further support or help, you can contact [Zoe Long, Head of Communications and Public Affairs](#) or [Melinda Mabbutt, Communications Officer](#).

## Appendix 1: Template email invitation

Dear [MP]

Congratulations on your recent (re-)appointment as MP for [constituency].

[LPC] represents community pharmacies in your constituency and we would like to invite you to visit one of them at your earliest opportunity. The visit will allow you to see first-hand all the work local pharmacy teams do for your local constituents, as well as to better understand the challenges they face.

We had in mind [xx pharmacy] at [address]. The pharmacy is providing a range of services which are highly valued by those who use it, in particular [insert services eg minor ailments advice, smoking cessation advice, etc].

[Possible sentence for returning MPs: We have very much appreciated your support for community pharmacy in the past, and we think this would be a valuable opportunity to update you on the latest developments and how pharmacies in [constituency] are managing.]

We will of course take photographs and promote the the visit on social media, and we would also like to invite the local press to showcase your support for a highly valued team of health professionals on the high street.

Please contact me on the details below so we can begin organising a pharmacy visit or, if you cannot spare the time, we would be happy to brief you on local pharmacy issues. I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely,

[LPC]

## Appendix 2: Template press release

[insert date]

LOCAL MP [insert name] TRIES  
LOCAL PHARMACY [XX SERVICE] OUT FOR SIZE

[Add photograph if possible. Provide caption with names of those included]

[Insert MP name] has visited [insert pharmacy name] to hear about the work the team are doing to help residents in [location]. [insert MP name] also heard about some of the challenges that pharmacies are facing following recent NHS funding squeezes.

During the visit [insert MP name] [insert activity as it took place e.g. discussed various services with the pharmacy team/ spoke to patients.]

In particular, pharmacist [insert name] was keen to tell them about how the pharmacy is [insert local text eg adapting to continue helping patients despite funding cuts/helping people who smoke to quit/other]. They also discussed the impact of NHS funding cuts to pharmacies, and the wider impacts this could have on health and care services.

[Insert pharmacist name] comments: “Community pharmacy teams are a trusted and very accessible part of primary care. We are the first port of call for healthcare for many people and our regular patients and the wider community really rely on us.

We provide much more than a great value dispensing service – we give people information, advice and interventions without the need to wait for an appointment. Many of the services we offer, such as home delivery, are a real help to some of the most vulnerable people in [insert location].”

[Insert LPC representative name] said: “[insert location] community pharmacies are much more than just places to get medicines. They provide a range of NHS services and ensure local people can get face-to-face professional healthcare advice without an appointment.

We believe the Government should be making better use of this network of healthcare locations in the heart of local communities, allowing them to offer a range of additional services that would both suit patients and reduce pressure on other healthcare services.”

[request quote from local MP’s team – **do not use a quote unless permission granted**. Some will prefer a draft quote for them to sign off. If so suggested wording follows.]

*Local MP commented, “As the pressure on GP practices grows, more people are turning to pharmacies when they are feeling unwell or need healthcare advice. Community pharmacies are well placed to take on other roles, such as providing flu vaccinations and supporting people with long-term conditions like asthma and diabetes. I am keen to ensure the Government works to develop community pharmacy services that meet the needs of both patients and health and special care services.”*

### **About community pharmacy**

Your local pharmacy is more than just a place to get medicines. It provides a range of NHS services and ensures people can get face-to-face, healthcare professional advice without an appointment.

There are around 14,000 community pharmacies across the UK, so for most of us, there’s one very close by. In fact, 96% of people can get to a pharmacy within 20 minutes by walking or using public transport. Community pharmacists provide rapid access, without appointment, to a healthcare professional and offer a range of clinical and

public health services. Most pharmacies now have consultation rooms, where you can talk with your pharmacist without being overheard.

You might be surprised at what pharmacies now offer: personalised medicines advice, help to quit smoking and to maintain good sexual health, treatment for common ailments, advice on preventing disease. And more. It's a package of care...not just packets of pills!

What's more, pharmacies are part of the fabric of local communities. They provide local employment and are a health and social care asset close to where people live, work and shop.

-ends-

[insert contact email and telephone number]