

May 2018

PSNC Briefing: 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?

Both Theresa May and Jeremy Hunt have called for a change to the way the NHS is funded, moving away from annual cash top-ups to a more sustainable, long-term funding plan. This comes after a difficult winter for health services, with the crisis in the NHS making regular headlines. All of which presents an opportunity for community pharmacy to once again highlight the roles it does, and could in the future, play in relieving pressures on other NHS services. By educating and informing MPs about the value community pharmacy can deliver, both to local communities and the healthcare system, our aim is to win their support for protecting the network of community pharmacies and developing them to become the new neighbourhood healthcare hubs.

Over the past two years, community pharmacy has built a profile among local and national politicians. But with so many demands for the attention of MPs, this support will lapse unless it is carefully nurtured. We must continue to demonstrate the positive difference that community pharmacies make, and to champion expanded roles for pharmacy and the consistent commissioning of services.

Visits to community pharmacies can be an excellent way in which to improve or build relationships with local MPs. Since the 2017 General Election, many Conservative MPs have greatly reduced majorities and they remain keen to be seen to be supporting local causes and services. They will also be keen to show how parts of the NHS are helping people, particularly after the difficult winter. MPs from opposition parties are still seeking to present themselves as the guardians of the NHS and social care services, also asking why the Government did not find solutions to prevent the NHS's winter crisis from occurring again.

All of which 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. Many newer MPs may now have visited a pharmacy but they will still be learning about policy and may welcome a second visit. The publication of PSNC's proposals for the future of community pharmacy could also be a good chance for all MPs to learn more about the sector's potential, and a visit would also be 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 MPs – It is important first to identify who the LPC's local MPs are, which parties they belong to and if any of them serve as a Minister or front bench spokesperson. There should be some record of what they have championed or spoken about in Parliament, depending on how long they have been elected. 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 to pharmacy or healthcare in their background or their parliamentary career to date, as this 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 some of your previous conversations with them. Make sure you invite MPs to visit a pharmacy within their constituency.

The following website has a search function which will allow you to easily find your MP:
<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**.

As well as showcasing community pharmacy, a visit may also provide an opportunity to discuss pharmacy policy and the current challenges facing the sector. Be aware that the visit may be short, due to MP's 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 them to do so. By emailing appg-team@luther.co.uk they can contact the APPG, but PSNC can help you with any of these follow-up actions.

4) Publicise the visit! – a pharmacy visit is a good 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 on 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 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 the 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 PSNC know by emailing [Zoe Long](#) or [Jessica Ferguson in the PSNC Public Affairs Team](#).

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 value and potential, both in terms of service provision and in its role in improving the nation's health. You may like to focus a visit on a particular service, so that the MP can see how the pharmacy team is helping local people and get an idea of how they could build on that to do more. You could also talk about PSNC's proposals for the future of the sector, to show how pharmacy would like to do more to help patients and other NHS services.

Many LPCs will want to raise concerns about workload and funding within an MP visit and this is appropriate, but more detailed and serious concerns could also be raised in writing or at a meeting. Also keep in mind the need to give MPs the impression that pharmacy is a sector that is helping patients and wants to do more. For example, you may like to highlight concerns by talking to MPs about how hard the pharmacy team is working, showing them any impact that the funding cuts have had, explaining the risks if pharmacy services are lost, and telling them about the need to give the team the capacity to do more to help local communities and reduce pressure on other local health services.

1) Key messages

It is important to keep visits as focused on the local constituency as you can. The following are some of the key national messages which can be used as themes for the visit, but where possible these should be made relevant by highlighting local examples. We would recommend picking just a couple of these points to focus on, so as to keep things as straightforward as possible.

Community pharmacies contribute huge value

In 2016 PSNC commissioned PwC to analyse the value (net benefits) to the NHS, public sector, patients and wider society of 12 specific services provided by community pharmacies in England in 2015. Services analysed included supervised consumption, emergency hormonal contraception provision, minor ailments and delivering prescriptions. The full PwC report can be downloaded from: psnc.org.uk/valueofpharmacy

Key findings were:

- Community pharmacies contributed a net value of £3 billion to the NHS, public sector, patients and wider society in England in 2015 through just 12 services.
- Community pharmacies deliver substantially more in benefits than they receive in compensation, providing excellent value to the Department of Health and Social Care.

This value must not be lost

Community pharmacies are currently facing huge financial pressures. Funding cuts combined with extreme volatility in today's medicines market mean that many pharmacies are now struggling to stay afloat. We are concerned for the impact on patients, local communities and the wider NHS and public sector, if community pharmacy services are lost or reduced.

We need to make more use of community pharmacies

Faced with congestion in A&E departments, busy GP surgeries and rising demand for health and 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 want to work more closely with GPs and do more both to help patients manage long term conditions and to support people in leading healthy lifestyles. We would like 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 is a strong consensus that community pharmacies can make an even greater contribution than they do at present to relieving the rising pressure on other parts of the health service. Community pharmacy is ideally-placed to provide more support for patients and the public including: supporting people to manage their long-term conditions; providing the first port of call for healthcare advice and treatment; and becoming neighbourhood health and wellbeing hubs. Yet the current direction of policy is to cut funding and consequently to see services reduce.

To make that happen, we must develop the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework

Community pharmacies are relied on to dispense more than a billion prescription items each year, and this number is rising. While this is a crucial function that must continue to be supported, we need also to make progress towards utilising the many other skills and resources of community pharmacy teams. The current funding arrangements combined with the very many financial pressures faced by local service commissioners mean that this is not happening. At a time when other parts of primary and secondary care are under immense pressure, this cannot make sense.

We want to ensure that people with long-term conditions are being properly supported

Some patients with long-term conditions would benefit from further support to help them get the best outcomes from their medicines and to better manage their conditions. PSNC's proposal for a Community Pharmacy Care Plan would give those who need it more regular access to conversations with a healthcare professional who can support them and help them to meet their health goals. This should help them to manage any symptoms, and to reduce both the impact that their condition has on their life and the risk of more serious complications.

We have a vision for community pharmacy's future

PSNC has proposed two ways in which the services that pharmacies currently offer could be developed:

- The Community Pharmacy Care Plan (CPCP)
- The Universal Community Pharmacy Care Framework

The CPCP is a service designed to make regular pharmacy support available to people with long-term conditions, such as asthma or diabetes, which can sometimes have life-threatening complications. Pharmacy teams would help people who could benefit from more support to stay healthy and to manage these conditions and symptoms, meaning they should have less need to see their GP and can avoid being admitted into hospital. The Care Framework describes some more gradual changes that could be made to the services that community pharmacies currently offer (known as the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework). This would include asking pharmacies to do things such as helping patients who have recently come out of hospital to use their medicines correctly, checking that patients are getting the most benefit from their medicines and ensuring that all medicines prescribed are as cost-effective as possible.

2) Useful resources

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

- [**PSNC's Community Pharmacy Care Plan Proposals**](#)
These proposals are intended to provide a possible mechanism to move towards a community pharmacy funding arrangement that fairly rewards community pharmacies for providing more patient care and support for people with long-term conditions.
- [**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. They will want to hear particularly about what goes on in the pharmacy that they visit, so do showcase any services and try to get across all the hard work that the pharmacy team are currently doing.

Top tips for the visit

- Recognising the need to raise concerns about the current workload and funding situation, try to keep the visit as positive as you can – the aim is for MPs to go away with the view that pharmacy is a sector that is working hard for patients and needs their support.
- Ask the MP to back their local pharmacies and support the case for developing the Care Plan service to help patients with long-term conditions
- Ask the MP if they will 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 too much policy detail.

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 [Jessica Ferguson, Public Affairs Officer](#).

Appendix 1: Template email invitation

Dear [MP]

[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 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 ways pharmacies are helping local residents to stay well.

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 managing supply issues for patients/adapting to continue helping patients despite funding cuts/helping people who smoke to quit/other]. They also discussed the role of community pharmacy in taking pressure off other healthcare providers such as GPs and hospitals.

[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 social 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]