

May 2017

PSNC Briefing 028/17: General Election 2017 – how to host a pharmacy visit for general election candidates

This PSNC Briefing provides guidance to help LPCs organise successful visits to community pharmacies for General Election candidates. During the election, we will be calling on all candidates to back their local pharmacies. A photo opportunity at a pharmacy during the campaign is an excellent way of demonstrating that support.

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 politicians and policy makers. NHS funding is likely to continue to be squeezed, and community pharmacy must do all that it can to build strong working relationships. The election offers an opportunity for community pharmacy to reset relationships, seeking a new and constructive relationship with the new Government after the election.

Community pharmacy's success in that effort will depend in part on the strength of local relationships with politicians of all parties. There are likely to be a number of new MPs following the election; and the earlier we can engage with them to get them interested in healthcare and pharmacy, the better. PSNC and the other national pharmacy organisations therefore believe that community pharmacy should seek to engage with Parliamentary Candidates ahead of the election, in order to build on the success of the campaign last year which built a huge amount of public and Parliamentary support. That support gives us leverage and a stronger position for the future.

Election candidates always have busy campaign schedules, and that is particularly true in this year's snap election. It is important, however, for candidates to be seen engaging with their communities and meeting voters. Visiting a local pharmacy enables candidates to do this, and so should be an attractive option for them. A visit also provides an excellent photo opportunity and fuel for social media, using the hashtags [#Pharmacy17](#) and [#GE2017](#).

Candidates may not have time to get into the detail of policy, but a visit is an opportunity to offer them a snapshot of the range of services that pharmacies provide, their key role in improving the community's health and wellbeing, and the opportunities you see for the development of pharmacy delivered health services.

Organising a visit: step by step guide

1) Identify your candidates – political parties have already selected election candidates in many constituencies, and all candidates must be declared by 11th May. Before the 11th May, the websites of your local political parties will be the best source to find out who your candidates are. After 11th May, all candidates will be listed on this website: www.yourvotematters.co.uk

If it is feasible, LPCs may like to consider inviting the two or three candidates with the most realistic prospect of winning the seat to visit a pharmacy. It is important not to show favouritism to a particular party, even if the constituency is a safe seat. LPCs are advised to use their discretion when engaging with smaller or fringe parties, and bear in mind that visits should not bring the sector into disrepute. Candidates from different parties should not be

invited to the same pharmacy on the same day. LPCs should be transparent about engaging with other candidates, candidates should not be given the impression that they have an exclusive invitation to visit a pharmacy.

It is best to position your approach to the candidates as an LPC activity on behalf of all the pharmacies in your area, as they can be wary of appearing to favour one business over another.

2) Do some digging on the candidates – unless they are sitting MPs, there is often limited information available about Parliamentary Candidates, but look out for campaign websites, leaflets and articles in the local press for any clues as to the candidates' background. You may be able to find information through web searches, but be wary of cases of mistaken identity. Look out for links to healthcare or community pharmacy that might provide a talking point or a hook for a visit.

3) Choose the pharmacy for the visit – the pharmacy you choose needs to demonstrate community pharmacy's best assets. Whether this is because of its accessibility or because of the quality and range of services provided, choose a local pharmacy that shows the best of community pharmacy. It should also, of course, be within the prospective constituency of the candidate.

4) Make the right approach – unless the LPC has a personal relationship with the candidate, they are best reached by email. A template invitation email is included as **Appendix 1**. The visit should be billed as a campaign opportunity, emphasising the chance to have a photograph taken, meet voters and show support for a highly valued team of health professionals on the high street. It is not an opportunity to discuss detailed pharmacy policy or the funding settlement.

You will most likely work with the candidate's election agent to find a time that is convenient for them. Be aware that the visit may be very short, and the candidate may not have much time to talk or to learn about pharmacy. This visit is the start of a relationship, and there will be time to build closer links after the election.

Where LPCs do have a good relationship with a candidate, it may be best to offer to talk to them about pharmacy in the context of the election, for instance covering how pharmacy could help alleviate some of the pressures on the NHS or social care.

5) 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. You can:

- 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 candidate. The national pharmacy organisations will provide LPCs with image files to produce poster boards emblazoned with the pledge 'I'm backing my local pharmacies' and the hashtag [#Pharmacy17](#).
- Social media is particularly important during the election campaign, 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, using the hashtags [#Pharmacy17](#) and [#GE2017](#). Encourage the candidate to share photos and use the [#Pharmacy17](#) hashtag as well. [Template tweets](#) are available on the [PSNC campaign page](#).
- 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. A template press release is included as **Appendix 2**.
- Make sure you include a quote from the pharmacy owner, the candidate, and any other relevant attendees (e.g. commissioner representative). You can approach all of these people in advance of the visit about adding a quote to the release. Or, you can ask the candidate for a quote on the day itself. If you are organising visits with several candidates, bear in mind their sensitivities when publicising visits.

- Keep an eye out for any coverage!

7) Follow up – post-event, thank those involved in the visit, particularly the candidate and their election agent. Following the election, send all candidates who visited pharmacies your congratulations or commiserations. There may be an opportunity to provide them with a further briefing, or to put them in touch with PSNC.

8) 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.

The visit: tone, content and key messages

The purpose of a pharmacy visit is to create a positive impression of community pharmacy, demonstrating pharmacy's assets and potential, in terms of supporting both the health of local communities and other local health and care providers.

It is important to keep visits positive and grounded in local constituencies, as candidates will be focused on engaging with their potential constituents and learning about local services. A pharmacy visit during the election campaign is not the best time to discuss detailed national policy. During a campaign, candidates, even if they are former pharmacy ministers or opposition spokespeople, are first and foremost local politicians with local concerns.

Community pharmacy's core message is simply: **community pharmacy is extremely valuable; please make use of it.** We should frame this in the context of congestion in A&E departments, busy GP surgeries and rising demand for social care, pointing out that it is more important than ever that we use the valuable network of community pharmacies on our high streets to keep people healthy and out of hospitals.

The key messages to focus on are:

- Community pharmacy is a trusted and valuable resource, helping people to stay healthy and avoid the need to see their GP or go to hospital. The PwC data and local experiences can be used to support this.
- There is a crisis in social care and community pharmacy can help to alleviate it. Examples could include services such as falls reduction service and domiciliary MURs; as well as support such as compliance aids and delivery which would add to pressures if not provided.
- There is a crisis in primary care and community pharmacy can help to alleviate it.

PSNC is producing background briefing resources including a briefing on pharmacy's potential long-term conditions role. LPCs could also refer to the [Community Pharmacy Forward View](#) or to the following policy statement which has been agreed by the pharmacy organisations:

Often the first port of call for advice and treatment, local pharmacists and their teams are a key part of your neighbourhood health service. Community pharmacies provide a range of NHS services, ensure people can get face-to-face care without an appointment, and take pressure off GPs and hospitals.

With consistent support from government, community pharmacists can do much more to:

- *Take pressure off GPs and hospitals*
- *Make access to NHS care more convenient*
- *Help people with long-term conditions*
- *Promote public health services*
- *Get better value from medicines*
- *Save the NHS money*

That is why we are asking candidates in the coming general election to show their support for pharmacy. #pharmacy17

Demand for social care, A&E and GP surgeries are important issues for this election and community pharmacy must be seen as part of the solution to all of these problems. We can say that we want to work more closely with GPs, whatever the challenges, and do more both to help patients manage long-term conditions and to keep people from getting unwell in the first place. We will do that by working with government to make the most of the valuable network of community pharmacies and developing new pharmacy services together.

Top tips for the visit

- Keep the visit positive
- Ask the candidate to back their local pharmacies
- Take a photo, if possible with a poster board
- 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

Candidates who would like more information on community pharmacy can be provided with briefings and resources from the [PSNC campaign page](#). Please note that this is being updated regularly, so keep checking for new materials. If candidates have questions about the Judicial Review they should be referred to [this statement on PSNC's website](#). Candidates with an interest in pharmacy can be encouraged to join the [All-Party Pharmacy Group](#) if elected. Please pass any useful intelligence about parliamentary candidates to PSNC.

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

Appendix 1: Draft letter to invite a candidate to visit a community pharmacy

GUIDANCE:

- Please replace all yellow highlights with local detail
- Use the name of the constituency, not the LPC area
- Estimate the number of pharmacies if necessary
- Include local detail where possible, but keep the email short
- Email the candidate's campaign address (available on their website – NOT an address ending @parliament.co.uk)
- Cc. The candidate's election agent if an address is available

Dear [Ms May]

I am writing on behalf of [Maidenhead]'s [25] local community pharmacies to invite you to visit [SuperPharm pharmacy on the York Road] for a photo opportunity during the general election campaign. There will be an opportunity to meet some of the thousands of patients who rely on our services and the dedicated health professionals who deliver them.

With increasing demand for social care places, pressure on GP surgeries and overcrowding in A&E, it is more important than ever that we support the job that community pharmacies do to keep people healthy and out of GP practices and hospital.

Please let me know if we can arrange a short visit at your convenience.

Kind regards

Appendix 2: Draft press release following a candidate pharmacy visit

(CANDIDATE) BACKS (CONSTITUENCY)'S COMMUNITY PHARMACIES

- **Photos available**

(NAME) the (PARTY) candidate for (CONSTITUENCY) pledged (HIS/HER) support for (NAME OF PHARMACY) and other pharmacies in (LOCATION) following an election campaign visit today.

(CANDIDATE NAME) met pharmacist (PHARMACIST NAME) and (HIS/HER) team to see how community pharmacies are easing the pressure on the NHS by freeing up time for GPs and Accident and Emergency departments. (NAME OF PHARMACY) provides advice and support for local patients to help them to get the most benefit from their medicines and to lead healthy lives. It also offers services for people with long-term conditions, including ordering repeat prescriptions, medication reviews and free medicine deliveries.

[PLEASE AMEND ALL QUOTES – EXAMPLE QUOTES ARE FOR ILLUSTRATION ONLY]

(CANDIDATE NAME) said: "I'm proud to be backing pharmacies like (NAME OF PHARMACY) in this election. The people of (CONSTITUENCY) deserve the best NHS healthcare, and we can only fix the problems we face with the pressure on the NHS by making the most of community pharmacy."

(PHARMACIST NAME) said: "Community pharmacy is a great and accessible way to find healthcare advice and support. We are the experts on the use of medicines and should be the first port of call if you are feeling unwell."

(CANDIDATE) met (PATIENT NAME), who uses (PHARMACY NAME) regularly to pick up (HIS/HER) asthma medicines. (HE/SHE) told (CANDIDATE) how (HE/SHE) had met the pharmacist last week to review (HIS/HER) inhaler technique. With an improved technique, (PATIENT) is feeling healthier and making the most of (HIS/HER) medicines.

(PATIENT NAME) said: "I really rely on my community pharmacy and I was delighted with the comprehensive service I received. I sat in a private room and we went through how I use the inhaler. (PHARMACIST) gave me some helpful advice that I have put into practice." [AMEND AS REQUIRED]