

PSNC Briefing for Commissioners: Community Pharmacy's Future

Background information

On 17th December 2015 the Government announced proposals for community pharmacy including a £170m reduction in funding in 2016/17. If the proposals go ahead as planned, as many as 3,000 pharmacies may close, key payments for pharmacies will be phased out, and there could be a drive towards a commoditised medicines supply service with an increased focus on warehouse dispensing and online services.

The national pharmacy organisations believe the proposals pose significant threats to patient care and the community pharmacy network across England, and we have put forward constructive counter proposals. We and your local pharmacies would like your support to encourage the Government to engage with these proposals.

Key concerns

1. The value of pharmacies has been underestimated

- People in England make 1.6 million visits to community pharmacies every day.
- As well as dispensing medicines community pharmacy teams help people to stay well and out of the GP's surgery, to get the most benefit from their medicines, and to manage their health conditions.
- Pharmacies are easy to access and form part of the fabric of local communities.
- More than 1 billion prescription items are dispensed by community pharmacies every year.
- Pharmacies delivered more than 3.17 million medicines use reviews to help people to understand and take their medicines correctly in 2014/15.
- Community pharmacies help us to stay well and prevent unnecessary visit to the GP's surgery and A&E.

2. The Government's plans threaten patient access to pharmacies and pharmacy services

- The Government has accepted that pharmacies may close. The Health Minister has suggested that up to 3,000 pharmacies – a quarter of pharmacies in England – could be forced to close under its plans.
- The Government has proposed a blanket cut in funding that will have unpredictable consequences. It has not yet confirmed the full extent of the cuts for future years.

3. The implications for patient care have not been properly considered and may be damaging

- The Government has not conducted an assessment of the impact of its proposals on patient safety, or on the quality of care and must commit to doing so.
- The Government must explain how its proposed changes will deliver a clinically-focused community pharmacy service and optimise the use of medicines.
- There is strong evidence that pharmacy can relieve the considerable pressure on GP surgeries and A&E.
- GPs have expressed concerns about the plans – the NHS Alliance has called them 'astonishing' and 'extremely short sighted'.

PSNC's counter proposal for the future of community pharmacy

PSNC believes the NHS must make better use of community pharmacy if it is to cope with the ongoing demands and pressure on urgent and other care services. The measures outlined in the counter proposal could generate savings in both **the NHS prescribing budget** and the **costs of out of hours GP services**.

Savings to the prescribing budget could be made through:

A not-dispensed scheme: not dispensing prescription items where the pharmacy team determines the patient already has sufficient stock at home.

A therapeutic substitution service: recommending alternative products to prescribers following the dispensing of products on a target list of 'costly' medicines.

Generic substitution: dispensing cheaper generic equivalents in place of certain prescribed branded products that have been agreed at a national level.

A focus on reducing waste in care homes: identifying excess prescribing and supply of medicines and dressings to care homes through regular reviews.

A campaign and audit on unwanted medicines: running annual campaigns encouraging patients to return unwanted medicines and reporting the results of the audit to local prescribers, minimising future medicines wastage.

In addition to these, an Emergency Supply service could reduce expenditure on out of hours services by allowing pharmacies to make emergency supplies of medicines to patients without the need for an urgent prescription.

The potential of community pharmacy longer term

Looking to the future, PSNC has [published community pharmacy service development proposals](#) that set out a longer term development plan for community pharmacies, which could see pharmacy teams taking on responsibility for managing routine repeat medications as well as helping patients with long-term conditions to manage their health. These include:

- Electronic repeat dispensing managed by pharmacies by default for people with long term conditions.
- Patient registration at pharmacies and enhanced medicines optimisation services.
- Inhaler technique checks and coaching sessions, Medicines Use Reviews after patients are discharged from hospital and advice on minor ailments.
- Six national public health campaigns annually

Summary

The Government's proposals have created huge uncertainty and anxiety, and could put patient care at risk. The consequences of them are unpredictable. The Government and NHS have yet to explain how they will prevent high quality, valued local services from being lost if pharmacies close.

PSNC, the negotiating body for community pharmacy, has made proposals that would make better use of the community pharmacy network and provide better value for the NHS. The Government and NHS must give these proposals proper consideration and decisions should not be made nor actions taken until it is clear what the impact will be and that it is not damaging.

How you can help

Commissioners and providers of local health services can help by considering the impact of the proposals on their local health network and patients. Your [Local Pharmaceutical Committee \(LPC\)](#) may be able to help in these discussions. Health providers and commissioners can then ask NHS England to explain the plans to them in more detail, and to outline what impact they think they will have.

Some practical things that commissioners can do to help are:

- Submitting a response to the [Government consultation on the future of community pharmacy](#) by 24th May (please contact [Zoe Smeaton, PSNC's Head of Communications and Public Affairs](#) for support).
- Signing our petition in local pharmacies
- Signing the [ePetition](#) to force a debate in Parliament
- Finding out more about the campaign: www.supportyourlocalpharmacy.org
- Joining the campaign on [Facebook](#)
- Declaring your support on Twitter using [#lovemypharmacy](#)
- Sharing this information with family, friends and colleagues

For further information, please contact zoe.smeaton@psnc.org.uk