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## Hosting a pharmacy visit for your local MP

This document provides guidance to help LPCs and pharmacy teams to organise successful visits to community pharmacies for local Members of Parliament.

### Why organise a visit?

In January, NHS England published the NHS Long Term Plan, setting out its priorities for healthcare over the next ten years, and showing how the £20.5bn funding settlement will be used. Whilst it is good to see what the NHS wants to achieve in the long-term, and how it plans to get there, our next step is to work with the NHS and the Government to explore exactly what community pharmacy's contribution to the plan will be. MPs are still very supportive of the community pharmacy sector and now the Plan has been released, it is a good opportunity to engage with your local politicians, letting them know how pharmacy can integrate with the Plan's aims.

Community pharmacy has built a profile among local and national politicians over the last two years, 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 can make, and to champion expanded roles for pharmacy.

Visits to community pharmacies can be an excellent way in which to improve or build local 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 be keen to show how parts of the NHS are helping people, particularly with the many challenges facing the NHS. MPs from opposition parties are still seeking to present themselves as the guardians of the NHS and social care services.

All of which provides LPCs and others 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 the NHS Long Term Plan could also be a good chance for 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](mailto: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. But 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.

### **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 reduced.

### **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](https://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.

### **The NHS Long Term Plan said it will make greater use of community pharmacies**

NHS England's statement that it will 'work with Government to make greater use of community pharmacists' skills and opportunities to engage patients' is positive; and we hope it reflects the fact that the NHS recognizes the skills of community pharmacists and wants to make better use of them. However, we need further clarification as to how this will be achieved.

We recognise that pharmacies will need to undergo a programme of change that enables them do more than just dispense medicines, by helping people to stay healthy and manage their long-term conditions – all while avoiding visits to GP surgeries and hospitals. Close integration with developing local healthcare networks and with GPs will be essential, as will campaigns that promote the use of pharmacy. Other healthcare providers in integrated networks should also be able to direct patients to pharmacy services, as well. To achieve this change programme, we would like to agree a multi-year settlement, setting out what pharmacies need to deliver in

each year in return for the funding they will receive. At the heart of this must be a Government vision setting out what it wants from pharmacies – this would enable the sector to plan. PSNC will look to work with Government and NHS England on setting out this vision.

## 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:

- [Community Pharmacy in the NHS Long Term Plan](#)  
This briefing outlines where community pharmacy was mentioned in the NHS Long Term Plan, and what this might mean for the sector. It also outlines some developments that we would like to see.
- [Community Pharmacy: Long Term Vision for the NHS](#)  
This briefing gives a general outline of where community pharmacy can contribute to the long-term future of the NHS. It was created in collaboration with the other national pharmacy organisations ahead of the publication of the NHS Long Term Plan.
- [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.

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](#) or [Jessica Ferguson](#) in the Public Affairs team.



## 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.

In particular, we thought you might like to visit a community pharmacy in [constituency] to see first-hand how the pharmacy team helps local residents to stay well. 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

### PRESS RELEASE

[insert date]

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

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

Today [insert MP name] visited [insert pharmacy name] to learn more about the work the team are doing to help residents in [insert 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 11,600 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]