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PSNC Briefing 006/20: An update about Patient Facing Services ('online services') and other app offerings

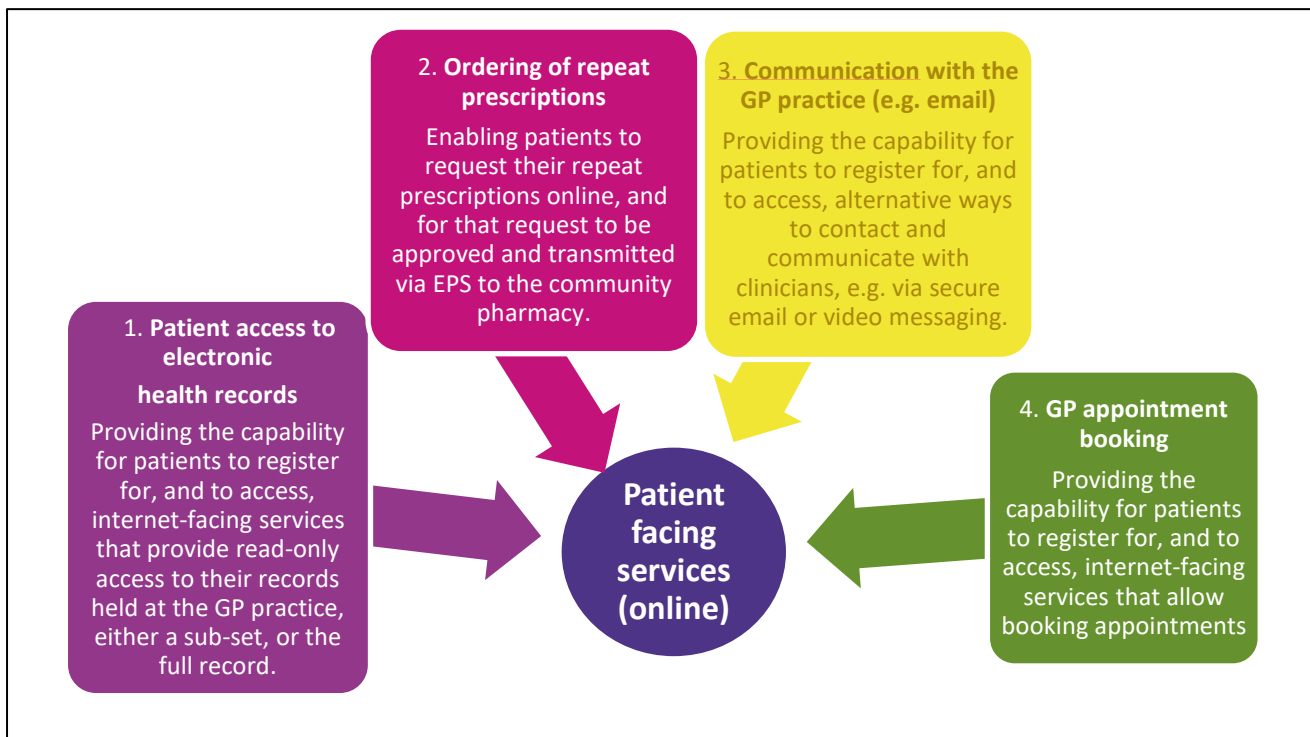
This PSNC Briefing provides an update for pharmacy contractors and Local Pharmaceutical Committees about PFS being provided via NHS / GP IT systems, as well as an update about patient apps offerings.

PFS are sometimes referred to within the NHS, as NHS 'online services' or 'GP online services'. These services allow patients to increasingly use the internet and apps for: viewing their electronic medical record; ordering repeat prescriptions; patient communications with GP practices, and booking GP appointments online.

Community pharmacy teams may want to understand how PFS are being used within their area in order to allow them to provide appropriate advice to patients, and may also want to consider whether they wish to support their patients being able to use an app that supports their healthcare and use of medicines e.g. the NHS App and/or other suitable patient apps for PFS and additional capabilities.

Overview of PFS

It is intended that online PFS will complement the traditional methods of contact patients have with their GP practice and the NHS, rather than replacing the need for face-to-face contact between patients and caregivers. The PFS are:



Note: NHS Digital is involved with the technical assurance of PFS and works with the online providers that make PFS available to patients. NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) are involved with the implementation of related policy. PSNC works with others including NHS Digital, NHSE&I and others on technology-related pharmacy issues.

Patient access to PFS

Clauses within the GP contract require GP practices to offer and promote PFS. GP practices can meet that requirement through the promotion of the NHS App and/or through the PFS app which their system supplier provides for their patients that choose to use that tool. The main GP system suppliers have all made PFS patient apps available for those patients which wish to access use these PFS tools.¹

NHS Digital previously published statistics that revealed since almost 100% of the English population could now be provided with access to PFS, and recent updates show there is growing use of PFS each year. Over time, patients will be able to access PFS and other services from an even wider range of suppliers, including more app developers.

The [NHS App](#) can act as a potential portal for patients to access both PFS and elements of their care record. In the future more and more apps which provide access to PFS will be publicised on the [NHS website](#) and within the [NHS Apps Library](#) when relevant [criteria](#) is fulfilled. Patients who would like to register to use a PFS may contact their GP practice or seek out an app which meets their need.

A number of international studies have concluded that patients with access to online features report greater satisfaction, improved self-care and better communication and engagement with clinicians. The studies also concluded that the services led to patient-led safety improvements (where medication errors were identified) and facilitated more use of preventive services.²

Lists of PFS providers

Lists include:

- The patient-facing NHS website webpage: [NHS list of online service providers](#).
- The [NHS Apps Library](#) – which includes a pharmacy category of apps.
- Lists which could be made visible from within the [NHS App](#).
- PSNC lists patient apps, most of which provide PFS (see list at [psnc.org.uk/apps](#)). PSNC has explained which PFS service each of those apps provides.

Some pharmacy contractors may also have their own tool or a selected tool which enables their patients that wish to, to be able to use some online features.

Patient choice

Technology providers which enable patients to use PFS, and organisations that list patient PFS apps must ensure that patients are exposed to balanced information in order to continue to make fair choices. Patients must continue to be empowered to make a fair choice about whether to use a PFS tool. Patients whilst using PFS tools must also continue to be able to make a fair choice about their chosen pharmacy contractor. Patients have the right to collect medicines that have been prescribed for them from any pharmacy they choose. If patients feel that their choice of pharmacy to dispense their prescription is being restricted or influenced, they may follow the process set out on the [NHS England and NHS Improvement's Poster/guidance on freedom of choice](#) (pdf). There are also additional guidelines for reporting or feeding back about apps at the PSNC apps webpage.

All EPS users including pharmacy contractors and GP practices must adhere to the NHS nomination guidance and the [Four Nomination Principles](#) described within it. That ensures that patients can make a fair decision about which pharmacy they wish to nominate. The [NHS Constitution](#) set out that patients must receive fair choice.

¹ SystemOne by TPP provides "[SystemOnline](#)", EMIS GP system provides "[Patient Access](#)", and Vision InPS provides "[Patient Services](#)". The more commonly used GP system suppliers are those working within NHS Digital's '[GP IT Futures](#)' framework.

² "[Patients' online access to their electronic health records and linked online services: a systematic review in primary care](#)" *British Journal of General Practice*, March 2015.

Beyond PFS: Additional online and app capabilities

The diagram on page one lists the four key current PFS offerings. However, patients may increasingly opt to seek out and use the internet or apps to support their health and their interactions with health and care staff even beyond those PFS. The table below sets out some example online/app features which patients may wish to use:

Category of app/online feature	Example features which patients are using or requesting
To be reminded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g. Reminders to take medicines for patients, or patient reminders to collect medicines from the pharmacy. Reminders could be sent by SMS text message, emails or app notification.
To learn healthcare information (general or personalised)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g. Patient access to their own electronic health records. • E.g. NHS website's medicines A-Z directory: The NHS website includes a Medicines A-Z online directory at nhs.uk/medicines. The patient-facing online directory may occasionally promote discussion between patients and the pharmacy team. The directory offers patient-friendly information on commonly-used medications, with guidance on dosage to management of side effects. Information within the tool will align with what is set out within patient information leaflets (PIL) and could be used by patients where the PIL has been lost. The directory has more than two million visitors each month – many of those visitors located within England.
To express choices about care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g. Selection of EPS nomination choice of pharmacy: The NHS App is piloting this feature to be made available within NHS App. • E.g. Organ donation preferences can be set using the NHS App.
To express choices about their health and care data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g. Patient data opt-out system: NHS Digital's national data opt-out system offers patients the opportunity to make an informed choice about whether they wish for their personal identifiable information to be used where only research / planning as the reason. Patient can express their wish via the NHS App, the NHS website or the NHS Digital telephone contact centre.
To confirm their identity (Authentication)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g. NHS login: Patients feedback to NHS Digital suggested that there had been frustration with separately authenticating their identity each time they began to use a different NHS-related app (e.g. with a new registration process to gather many new login details). The purpose of authentication systems is to protect user data. The NHS App is already integrated with the NHS login authentication system. This NHS login system enables the patients go through a robust authentication system which more than one app developer can align with. App developers that fulfil criteria may integrate with NHS login to provide patients with a smoother experience for patients that use multi apps that enable 'log-in with your NHS login'.
To book pharmacy appointments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g. Pharmacy appointment booking: Some pharmacy contractors may enable patients to use an app or website to book a pharmacy appointment with the pharmacy. Some pharmacy contractors have been testing this out during 2019. Read more at: psnc.org.uk/apps.

Pharmacy contractors may continue to explore how their patients may benefit from the use of appropriate apps and medicines-related features and may also refer to PSNC's briefing about seeking out higher quality apps (see below).

Further resources and information

Read more at: psnc.org.uk/apps, psnc.org.uk/pfs, and [PSNC's Briefing: Features of higher quality health apps and how to give app feedback](#). PSNC works with the Community Pharmacy IT Group ([CP ITG](#)) and others on some app-related matters. If you have queries on this PSNC Briefing or the topic, or would like to request pharmacy-related features which could be considered for adding to NHS App, please contact [Daniel Ah-Thion, Community Pharmacy IT Lead](#) or it@psnc.org.uk.