

March 2020

PSNC Briefing 016/20: COVID-19 Response – PSNC Negotiations Action List

This briefing outlines the scope of the urgent discussions that are ongoing between PSNC, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), and NHS England & NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) to ensure that community pharmacy teams have the support they need to play their role in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As this list indicates, there is a huge amount of work to do and PSNC is working in collaboration with DHSC and NHSE&I at pace. Some of the things under discussion can be done reasonably quickly, but other things need legislative changes and/or collaboration with other sectors, and will take longer. PSNC, DHSC and NHSE&I are all working through this long list and constantly reprioritising to meet ever-changing needs. On all topics we will announce decisions and details to contractors as soon as we are able to.

PLEASE NOTE: This document includes a list of PSNC's ambitions; these are the subject of urgent ongoing discussions and do not represent HM Government policy.

Key PSNC Negotiations Topics and Objectives

PSNC is seeking urgent resolution of negotiations on the following changes and new services:

- **The national Medicines Delivery Service:** This service was announced by HM Government and will support vulnerable (“**shielded**”) patients self-isolating at home. We are seeking agreement on the fees to be paid to contractors for the service and the service specification for this new national service. See: [COVID-19 Update: Medicines delivery service & 111 Online CPCS referrals](#).
- **Suspension of further pharmacy services:** In addition to the requirements on contractors that have already been lifted and the services that have been postponed, PSNC is seeking agreement for MURs and the NMS to be suspended during the pandemic.
- **An emergency cash injection and funding protection for closed pharmacies:** PSNC has made representations to Government about the immense pressure pharmacies are under and the need for an urgent funding injection to the sector to ease cashflow, as well as for financial protection for any pharmacies forced to close temporarily during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **An NHS Emergency Supply Service, to be switched on locally as needed:** This is a service for patients whose GP practice is closed, allowing them to continue receiving their medicines without a prescription. The service will be switched on locally as needed – this has already happened in part of Devon. PSNC is seeking to finalise the service specification and funding arrangements for local use as needed.
- **Protection for staff re-deployment:** Where a pharmacy has to temporarily close, PSNC is seeking indemnity cover for any staff that are re-deployed elsewhere.

Practical issues

In addition to the above negotiations, PSNC is in discussions with DHSC and NHSE&I on a wide range of practical matters which, if actioned, could support community pharmacies through this time. Some of these are summarised below.

Contractual/regulatory matters

We have already secured agreement that actions will not be taken against contractors who fail to undertake a clinical audit, complete the Community Pharmacy Patient Questionnaire process or keep their practice leaflet up to date, as well as an extension of the deadline for the Data and Security Protection Toolkit.

We have also gained agreement to the suspension of the requirements for contractors to submit quarterly NMS and MUR returns, and annual complaints reports (see: [COVID-19 Update: PQS, pharmacy services and payments](#)).

Other topics being explored include an extension of the term of the current Pharmaceutical Needs Assessments, which are coming up for review by local Health and Wellbeing Boards shortly and a suspension of the need to undertake prescription-linked healthy lifestyle interventions.

Staffing/pharmacy premises

Following discussion with PSNC, NHSE&I has now agreed to allow temporary closed-door working arrangements as outlined in the updated pharmacy SOP (see: [Updated COVID-19 SOP and Opening Hours Flexibility: Statement from PSNC, CCA, NPA and AIM](#)). We are also seeking priority COVID-19 testing for all pharmacy staff thought to be infected; agreed guidance on further steps pharmacies can take to protect their staff; and recognition of and protection from the increased risk of crime against pharmacies as all other businesses are in lockdown.

Resources/public guidance

PSNC is asking for the supply of public information posters and other materials (e.g. pull-up banners) for pharmacies to be funded by HM Government, as well as for pharmacy to receive further supplies of Personal Protective Equipment from Public Health England. We have also been pressing for Government to issue clear communications to the public about the role of pharmacies during the pandemic, how to use them responsibly and the need to treat pharmacy staff with courtesy and respect, recognising the important and difficult role they are undertaking as part of the NHS team.

Medicines supply/dispensing

NHSE&I has already responded to PSNC's request for repeated communications to go to GP practices asking them not to extend periods of treatment and to flag the benefits of electronic repeat dispensing.

We are also now in urgent discussions about a temporary exemption from signing prescription forms; the precautions needed to dispose of medicines returned from COVID-19 infected patients; and a range of process changes which could reduce bureaucratic burdens for pharmacy teams and protect stock.

NHS IT

PSNC is seeking an easing of the process by which the 5F locum code is added to NHS smartcards and the provision of guidance on use of EPS during the pandemic and what to do in relation to IT systems where a pharmacy has to close for a period of time.

Pharmacy services

Referrals from NHS 111 online to the Community Pharmacist Consultation Service (CPCS), where patients need an urgent supply of a medicine or appliance, have already been rolled out across the whole of England (see: [COVID-19 Update: Medicines delivery service & 111 Online CPCS referrals](#)).

Other ideas

In addition to the areas listed above, PSNC is considering making proposals such as the possible temporary extension of face-to-face training requirements and ways to reduce the use of paper forms. PSNC would also like to see GP practices, where they wish to make changes to their working practices, communicating with local pharmacies and consider the impact on them.

If you have queries on this PSNC Briefing or you require more information, please contact [PSNC Communications Team](#).