**COVID-19: SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL PHARMACY HEROES**

Dear [MP],

[As you know,] The [xxx Local Pharmaceutical Committee] represents the community pharmacies in [name of constituency]. We [have very much appreciated your previous support for community pharmacy and] wanted to highlight some information about the community pharmacy response as the COVID-19 pandemic continues.

Community pharmacies have been working tirelessly to ensure the public can get the medicines and healthcare support that they desperately need as the COVID-19 outbreak continues. Pharmacies are seeing an unprecedented demand for advice and increases in prescription volumes and requests for over-the-counter medicines. Many GP surgeries are also now providing care remotely, meaning that pharmacies are playing an even more crucial role on the frontline of the NHS, serving patients and the public in local communities.

To cope with the increased demand brought on by the outbreak, many pharmacies have had to introduce different ways of working to cope, such as operating queuing systems outside the pharmacy to help maintain social distance practices. Many pharmacies also now have perspex screens installed at the counter to provide extra protection against potentially infectious customers. The government provided some funding towards this (£300 per pharmacy to support installation), although some contractors have reported very high prices for these screens. Restrictions have also been placed on the quantity of over-the-counter drugs available to customers. There have been some reports of violence and abuse from some customers, who have been frustrated by some of these changes, which is adding to existing pressures in the workplace.

In terms of funding, pharmacies were already experiencing cash flow problems due to real-term funding cuts prior to the current situation, but unfortunately the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating the situation. The Government has made a £300m advance payment to the sector to ease cashflow issues but has made it clear that this money is an advance and will need to be paid back. The sector is already underfunded and will not be able to afford this.

There is much more that the sector needs at a national level to ensure pharmacies can continue to serve patients at this time, including:

* **Additional funding:** A long-term increase to total pharmacy funding is needed in recognition of the unprecedented challenges that pharmacies are already facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many community pharmacies are at financial cliff-edge – the sector urgently needs additional funding to help it to manage the new pressures being put on it.
* **PPE:** We need adequate supplies of quality personal protective equipment (PPE) in all pharmacies. Although additional funding has been granted to help pharmacies install protective barriers, some pharmacies are still reporting difficulties in sourcing masks and aprons.
* **COVID-19 testing**: Testing for community pharmacy staff must be prioritised so that they can continue to work on the frontline and support patients.

We would be very grateful if you are able to help support the sector, and if you would like any other information about the local pharmacy response to the COVID-19 outbreak, or if we can be of assistance in any other way, please don’t hesitate to be in touch.

Kind regards,

[xxx]