**COVID-19 resource: Crib sheet for talking to MPs**

LPCs may receive queries from their local MPs about the community pharmacy response to the COVID-19 pandemic. LPCs may also be planning some wider engagement with local MPs to demonstrate how pharmacies have been working tirelessly to ensure that local patients and the public have been able to continue to access the medicines and healthcare support that they need.

Below are some key points to include in any discussions with MPs.

**Changes to pharmacy ways of working**

Where other public services have been forced to close or limit public access, community pharmacies have remained open, and in order to do so, many pharmacies have had to make changes to their usual ways of working to ensure that patients and the public can continue to access their medicines. MPs will want to hear about how pharmacies have adapted to remain open at this time.

**Key messages about changes to ways of working include:**

* Many pharmacies are operating a queueing system and are only letting a few people in at a time, which is necessary to maintain social distancing 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.

**Changes to pharmacy opening hours**

Many MPs will be interested to hear about changes to pharmacy opening hours throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because they will want to understand how their constituents can continue to access pharmacy services, but they will also want to hear about how pharmacies are adapting to remain open despite ongoing pressures.

**Key messages about changes to opening hours include:**

* Changes have been made to allow pharmacies to close their doors to the public for up to 2.5 hours a day to allow staff to eat and rest. In reality, most pharmacies also need this time to catch up on dispensing medicine ready for their patients.
* If a pharmacy is closed during the day, as per above, a sign on the door is required to make sure patients can contact the pharmacy in case of an emergency.
* Pharmacies were mandated to stay open this year for Good Friday and Easter Monday. Many pharmacies usually close on these days, but due to the unprecedented demand brought on by the COVID-19 outbreak, this year many remained open between 2pm-5pm (and some were open for longer) to continue to provide medicines and support to patients and the public.

**Patient messaging**

Where you can, please encourage your MPs to share some patient messaging to their constituents. MPs will want their local pharmacy staff to stay safe and healthy, so that pharmacies can stay open throughout the pandemic. They may happy to help share some key messages to their constituents in order protect pharmacy teams so that they can continue to carry out their critical roles during this unprecedented time.

**Key points for MPs to share with their constituents are:**

* Avoid pharmacies if you are showing symptoms of COVID-19: If you have a dry, persistent cough, fever or shortness of breath, please avoid entering your local pharmacies as you would any other healthcare setting.
* Be patient: All pharmacies are under immense pressure and working around the clock to ensure that you get what you need.
* Respect pharmacy staff: they are providing NHS services and deserve the same respect as any other frontline NHS worker.
* Order medicines as normal: There is no need to stockpile medicines. Ordering extra prescriptions and buying more over the counter medicines than you need will contribute to disruption to the medicines supply chain, which is otherwise robust.

**What more do pharmacies need?**

Many MPs will want to know what more pharmacies need to continue to remain open and serve their local constituents. Some may offer to ask questions in Parliament or write letters to the Minister or Health Secretary calling for extra support.

**Key messages about what more pharmacy needs:**

* **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.
* **Prescribing patterns:** We need all prescribers to keep their existing prescribing patterns so that potential medicines shortages are not exacerbated - some GP practices are issuing 56-day prescriptions with serious implications for pharmacy capacity and medicines shortages.
* **Prescription charge exemption:** The charge may be even more difficult for some to afford in the current environment and collecting it is another administrative burden for pharmacies.
* **COVID-19 testing**: Testing for community pharmacy staff must be prioritised so that they can continue to work on the frontline and support patients.

If you have any queries about the content of this resource, or need any help with a follow-up, please contact: jessica.ferguson@psnc.org.uk