



Rt Hon Matt Hancock  
Secretary of State  
Department of Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

24 April 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

We write from the British Medical Association (BMA), Dispensing Doctors Association (DDA) and the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (PSNC) to highlight some of the challenges and risks faced both by those dispensing prescriptions and patients accessing prescriptions during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and to ask you to take urgent action to reduce these risks.

Patients collecting prescriptions are required to provide both a signature and a payment (unless the patient has an exemption certificate). This interaction puts both the dispenser and patient at increased risk through unnecessary contact. By virtue of their role, dispensers will come into significant face to face contact with a number of people throughout their working day and are just as at risk as other key workers, including their colleagues working in hospitals across the UK.

We understand that the Government intends to extend the validity period for exemption certificates for low income, maternity and medical exemptions to ensure that already vulnerable patients in these categories will not need a renewed exemption certificate and can use their existing certificate. This will reduce the chances of infection and workload at this critical time and we support this as a first step in reducing unnecessary contact. In addition, where someone is entitled to a new exemption certificate, they are shielding or are homeless, we also support a more flexible, trust based approach. This would allow the dispenser, without fear of penalty, to provide prescriptions to these patients without charge.

In our view, it is not appropriate in any instance to seek signatures from patients, at this time, and we recommend that recording of personal details should be sufficient to enable a consistent reduced contact approach. This would include a temporary suspension of the need for a signature when collecting controlled drugs from a dispenser. We would also ask that as part of this process Government looks to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy in the long term, by permanently removing the requirement for patients (who have to pay a prescription charge) to sign a declaration on the prescription form or EPS token. This is an unnecessary process generating both additional work and cost for both patient and dispenser and we recommend removing the process permanently.

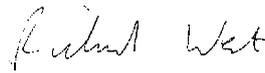
While the implementation of the above measures would limit some unnecessary contact, while prescription charges remain in place for those without exemptions an increased level of risk still exists for dispensers and patients. Our recommendation, to allow for a smoother and safer prescription procedure for all, is the introduction of a temporary removal of the prescription charge altogether. While the removal of increased handling of prescriptions would be a positive step, this alone is not enough to significantly protect patients and frontline staff and is greatly undermined if patients continue to have to pay to access their prescription.

We ask that you give consideration to this approach and consider carefully the impact that removing the need for prescription signatures and prescription charges will have to save lives – protecting vulnerable patients and those working daily on the frontline to dispense prescriptions at a time of heightened risk to their own safety and that of their families.

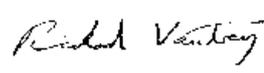
Yours sincerely,



Simon Dukes  
Chief Executive,  
Pharmaceutical Services  
Negotiating Committee



Dr Richard West MBE  
Chairman, Dispensing  
Doctors' Association



Dr Richard Vautrey  
Chair, BMA General  
Practitioners Committee