

## Community Pharmacy: Winter Pressures Briefing

Pharmacies continue to do all they can to support the national effort against COVID. They have continued to see patients in person, offering healthcare advice and support as well as dispensing vital medicines. The pandemic has shown just how valued they are by the public with an estimated 1.6 million patient visits every day, in part because they are so accessible - 90% of people in England are less than 20 minutes' walk away from their nearest pharmacy.

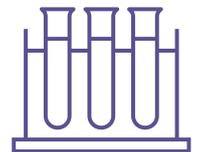
Pharmacies are central to the Government's COVID response, so far distributing over 15 million lateral flow testing kits and providing 22 million COVID vaccinations. Throughout the pandemic they have also offered a pandemic delivery service, ensuring those who are self-isolating or were shielding could still receive their medicines. They have also provided almost 5 million flu jabs this winter.

But in delivering all these successes, pharmacies are currently under extreme operational pressures. There is a growing workforce crisis, ongoing financial and capacity pressures and staff morale is low due to increased working hours and other pressures. We are particularly worried about the impact of spiralling business costs, such as the rise in National Minimum Wage, on pharmacies: unlike other businesses they are not able to pass costs on to consumers, and they are already delivering impressive efficiencies year on year. Despite this, pharmacy teams have continued to work tirelessly to keep their doors open throughout this latest wave.

To preserve patient access to their local pharmacies, and to prevent more serious service disruption, we urgently need additional funding from the Government, in recognition of these extraordinary pressures. To give the sector stability and long-term business confidence, we also need the Government to engage with developing a long-term vision for community pharmacy.

### Lateral Flow Tests

Community pharmacy teams are reporting a huge surge in demand for Lateral Flow Tests. We have been reassured by UKHSA, that there is plenty of stock in the country – but some delays are still occurring because of the logistics involved in getting this unprecedented volume of tests out to pharmacies. Pharmacies are only allowed to order one carton of tests per day, but most are not receiving this many deliveries. Even where daily deliveries are being received, pharmacies say the tests they have are often being handed out to people within the first few hours of the pharmacy opening. Repeated requests for tests, where stock levels are just not available, are putting additional pressure on busy pharmacy teams.



It is concerning that some pharmacies also say that their teams are being abused by members of the public who have visited the pharmacy to attempt to procure test kits but are unable to get them. We would ask MPs to reiterate their support for pharmacies and encourage calm and patience amongst the public whilst they seek to pick up a testing kit.

### COVID Vaccinations

It is fantastic that we have over 1,200 community pharmacy-led COVID-19 vaccination sites up and running. We know patients value these vaccination sites and that pharmacies have made a significant contribution to the national COVID-19 vaccination efforts.

The sector could do far more to help with any future booster campaigns. Many thousands of community pharmacies applied to become COVID vaccination sites earlier in 2021, yet only 1,454 sites were accepted. We would like to see

more of the nearly 4,000 additional sites which pharmacy owners felt could offer COVID vaccinations now being used to do so – this could help meet the Prime Minister’s targets, ease pressure on General Practice, and help improve accessibility for the public.

Long-term, if regular boosters are required and become business as usual, pharmacies are the logical place from which to do this. We would ask MPs to continue to encourage their constituents to get vaccinated and we would also value your voice in calling for more pharmacies to be able to offer COVID vaccinations.



### Walk-in Healthcare advice

As well as dispensing prescription items in a COVID-secure way, pharmacies have delivered healthcare advice and been a buffer for the NHS, helping their local communities and reducing pressure on other NHS healthcare providers.



Data from [our audit](#) in January 2021 found that community pharmacies across England deliver 58 million informal, appointment-free consultations per year, saving the NHS some 24 million GP appointments. During the audit, 8.6% of people seeking advice from a pharmacy said they had been unable to access another part of the healthcare system: that is around five million per year. We will be repeating this audit shortly and will share results with you in due course.

We are currently calling for an expansion in the service that enables pharmacists to offer formal healthcare advice to patients- the Community Pharmacist Consultation Service (CPCS). We would appreciate MPs support in calling for a walk-in option to be added to this service, ensuring that all patients who need a consultation with a pharmacist can get it, while saving GPs some of the need to make referrals to it.

### Pharmacy Pressures

There has been a combination of sustained pressures on NHS community pharmacy teams, both operational and financial, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Pharmacies are currently making massive efficiency savings of between 37% and 50% to keep delivering the services set out in their contractual framework. Pharmacy staff costs have grown significantly since 2015/16 and the recently announced increase in the National Minimum Wage will further contribute to the cost pressures.

Unlike other businesses, pharmacies are not able to pass their costs on to their consumers, and nor can they find other purchasers – some 90% or more of their income comes from NHS funding. We are concerned about the potential for funding and other pressures to force pharmacies to close, whether temporarily or permanently. To ease financial pressures and avoid patient services being cut, pharmacies need to be fairly funded by the NHS and government.

We would encourage MPs to visit their local pharmacy to see, first-hand, the excellent work that community pharmacies are doing, despite all the pressures they are under. Alternatively, we can also arrange a virtual briefing for you, to be attended by one of your constituents. If this is of interest, please contact: [commsteam@psnc.org.uk](mailto:commsteam@psnc.org.uk)